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Scans  
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Life of  
a E. Humphrey



To my Friend  
Robt Brooks Finch  
a Souvenir of the  
old School

A. E. Humphrey.



## THE PIONEER

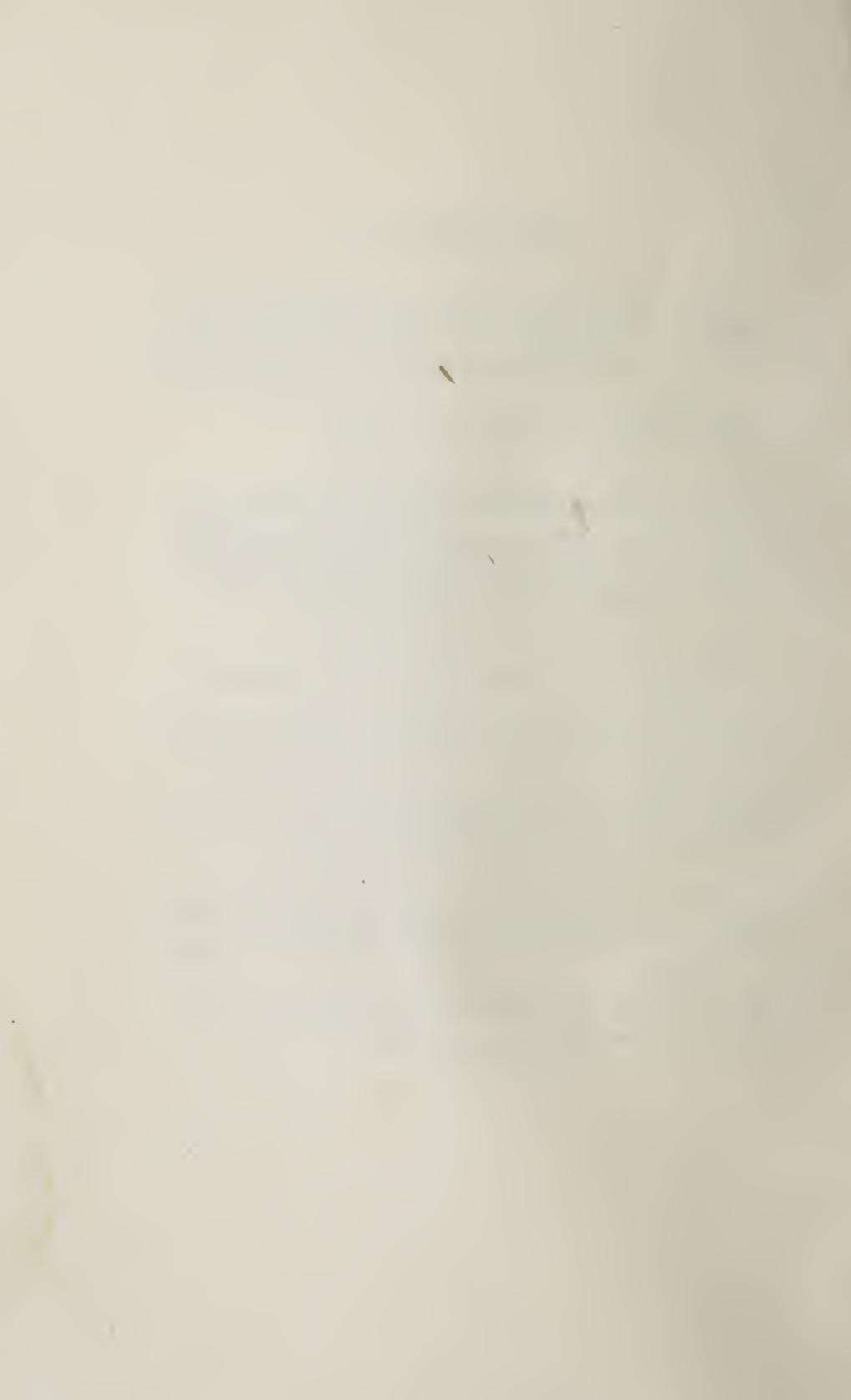
*“He is swart from the glow of the merciless sun,  
And his muscles are sore from the work he has done;  
He has builded his home where the prairie wolves  
roam—*

*He’s the Hewer, the Blazer of Trails.*

*“He is crude with the strength of the seeker of toil;  
From the hot, barren wastes he is gathering spoil  
For a nation that lives from the bounty he gives—  
He’s the Builder, the Winner of Ways.*

*“Where the silent wastes bake in the summer’s hot  
glow,  
Where the forests are choked in the shroud of the  
snow,  
By his brain and his brawn a new nation is born—  
He goes forward to conquer new realms.*

*“And the world has its heroes of lace and gold braid,  
That are honored and wined for the waste they have  
made;  
But the world little knows of the debt that it owes  
To the Hewer, the Blazer of Trails.”*







ALBERT E. HUMPHREYS

Albert E. Humphreys

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THE PIONEER  
A BIOGRAPHY

BY  
ROBERT FROTHINGHAM



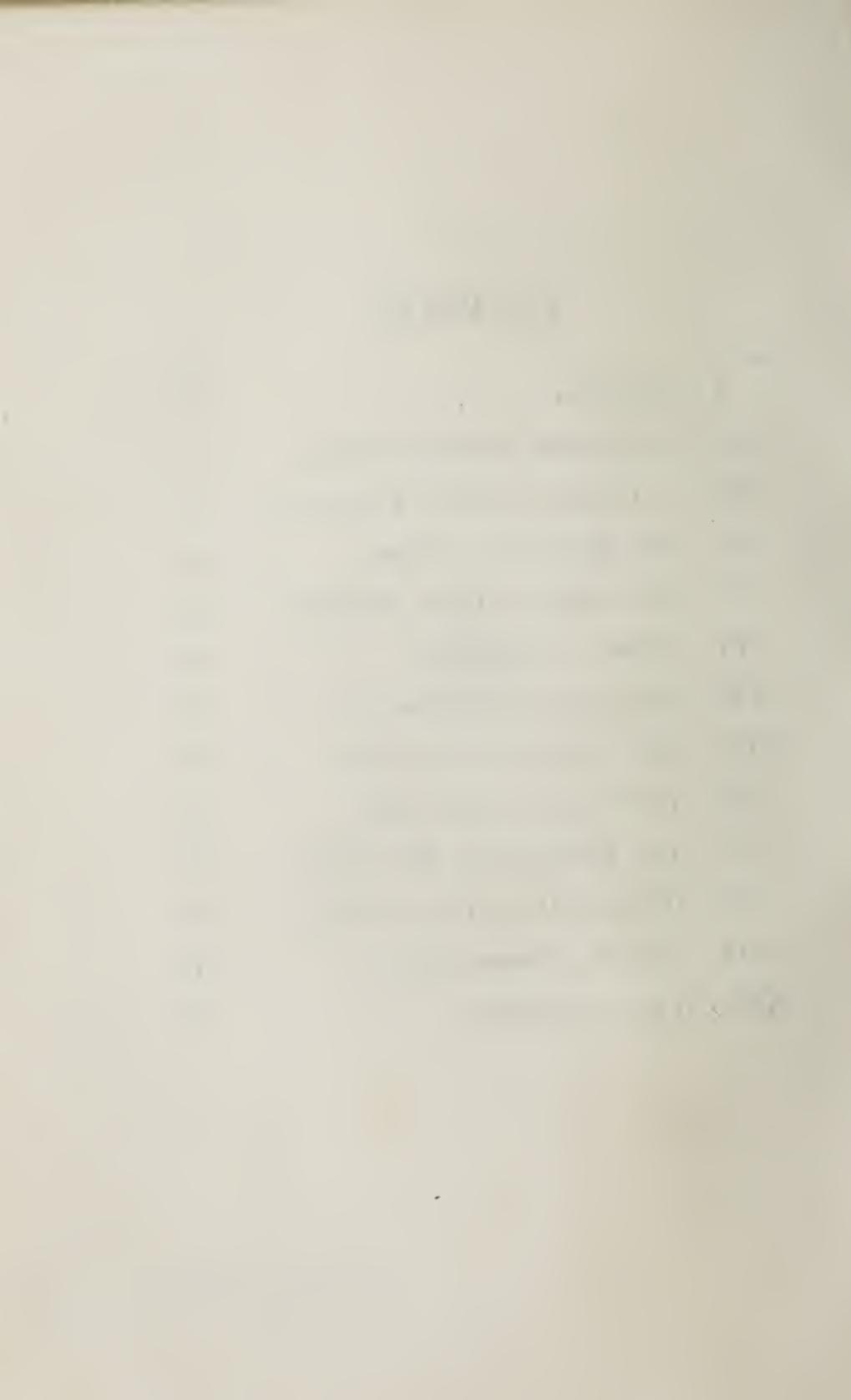
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# THE PIONEER

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## CHAPTER I

### ANCESTRY

“I shall not ask the High Gods  
For aught that they can give;  
They gave the greatest gift of all  
When first they bade me live.  
Great gift of dawn and starlight,  
Of sea and grass and river;  
With leave to toil and laugh and weep  
And praise the sun forever.”

IN that matchless allegory by Charles Rann Kennedy, *The Servant in the House*, he paints a thrilling picture of the upbuilding of the Church of the Brotherhood of Man in the following words:

“You must understand, this is no pile of stones and unmeaning timber. *It is a living thing.*

## THE PIONEER

“When you enter it you hear a sound, a sound as of some mighty poem chanted. Listen long enough, and you will learn that it is made up of the beating of human hearts, of the nameless music of men’s souls—that is, if you have ears. If you have eyes, you will presently see the church itself—a looming mystery of many shapes and shadows, leaping sheer from floor to dome: the work of no ordinary builder!

“The pillars of it go up like the brawny trunks of heroes: the sweet human flesh of men and women is molded about its bulwarks, strong, impregnable: the faces of little children laugh out from every cornerstone: the terrible spans and arches of it are the joined hands of comrades; and up in the heights and spaces there are inscribed the numberless musings of all the dreamers of the world. It is yet building—building and built upon. Sometimes the work goes forward in deep darkness: sometimes in blinding light: now beneath the burden of unutterable anguish: now to the tune of a great laughter and heroic shoutings like the cry of thunder. Sometimes, in the silence of the night time,

## ANCESTRY

one may hear the tiny hammerings of the comrades at work up in the dome—the comrades that have climbed ahead."

This is the picture that rises before my mind's eye as I commence this biography of my friend and companion Albert E. Humphreys, that courageous soul of the Southland, that lover of liberty and his fellow man who has kept his faith without a stain amid a sordid world. It is easy to speak good of the dead; it is correspondingly difficult to write restrainedly of the living whose name still stands as a synonym for deeds accomplished, who has always taken the part of the weak against the strong, who plays the game of life in a big, clean, manly fashion, and of whom it may be said that unselfishness is his virtue and human dignity his religion.

A rich heritage of self-reliance, the characteristic product of a Scotch-Irish ancestry, and practically nothing beside, awaited young Humphreys' advent into the world in January, 1860. The little hamlet of Sissonville, on the banks of the Pocataligo River, Kanawha County, not far from the city of Charleston, Virginia (now West Virginia),

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was probably as desirable as any spot in the State for the birth of a man-child who was destined to become, successively, a prophet without honor and a citizen of whom his native State would one day be proud. So runs the world away!

Mr. Humphreys' father, Ira A. Humphreys, was born at the foot of the Blue Ridge Mountains near Charlottesville, Virginia, in 1834; his mother was a Dawson, born in 1833 of sturdy Kanawha County stock, known for generations throughout the Sissonville countryside; both attained length of years and went to their final earthly rest in the old Mount Zion burying ground at Sissonville. Humphreys' grandfather was Spicer Humphreys, also a Virginian, and a collateral descendant of Joshua Humphreys, the designer of the *Constitution* and other famous frigates of the War of 1812, and commonly known as the "Father of the American Navy." Spicer Humphreys was a prosperous planter and a wholesale dealer in tobacco, which latter brought him a tidy fortune and finally ruined him, which calls for no particular comment at this late day, except as to its bearing on an

## ANCESTRY

incident which changed the whole course of his life and doubtless that of his descendants as well. In addition to being an enterprising business man, he was somewhat of a mechanical genius and a constructing engineer. He invented and built the first threshing machine, commonly known in that day as a chaff-piler, of which the threshing machine of to-day is practically a duplicate with the exception of the separator, fan, and stacker which were added by Cyrus McCormick after Spicer Humphreys' death, and which laid the foundation of the great McCormick family fortune; and thereby hangs a tale.

Spicer Humphreys' partner in the tobacco business was a speculator with Napoleonic aspirations as a tobacco financier. He tried to corner the market and, for a time, succeeded. Incidentally, he endorsed the notes of a large number of tobacco growers with whom his firm dealt. In those days they used to haul tremendous loads of "the weed," drawn by four-horse teams, to the Richmond and Baltimore markets. When Spicer's partner cornered the market by buying up the tobacco crop and holding it for

## THE PIONEER

higher prices, it looked as if they had the world by the tail, and Spicer had equally roseate visions of financing his chaff-piler and making a barrel of money. He didn't know, however, that his partner had endorsed all those nice little notes. And when the crash came, as crashes have a way of coming, without regard to periods of time and the human equation, Spicer Humphreys' dreams of revolutionizing the grain threshing industry of the country vanished into thin air. Crushed by his failure, he gathered up the few belongings that were left and, with his wife and six children, moved into the mountains and located a little home on Craig's Creek, a tributary of the James River, where he died a few years later, in the fall of 1852. It was just about this time that Cyrus McCormick appeared on the scene, added his improvements to Spicer Humphreys' chaff-piler, and sailed into fame and fortune.

With that characteristic pride of the Southerner, Spicer Humphreys' widow, handicapped as she was by her advancing years, decided to move even farther away from the scene of her husband's failure.

## ANCESTRY

Not long after his death she shook the dust of Craig County off her feet and, with her five sons, who had arrived at man's estate, and one daughter, crossed the Alleghany Mountains, headed for the western part of the State, followed down the Greenbrier, New, and Kanawha rivers, and settled in the little town of Sissonville, on the Pocataligo River, in Kanawha County: a sparsely settled county, covered with virgin forest and filled with wild game. It was amid such primeval surroundings—a priceless heritage to his creative instinct and self-reliance—that the subject of this sketch was born.

## CHAPTER II

### A PROPHET WITHOUT HONOR

“Not for the glory of winning,  
Not for the fear of the night;  
Shunning the battle is sinning—  
O spare me the heart to fight!”

LIKE most of our forefathers who were trained to work with their hands, Spicer Humphreys in his younger days was a first-class carpenter and builder. He believed that every man should learn a trade, and he brought up his boys accordingly. His son Ira, who was an expert millwright, could go into the woods with an old-fashioned scratch awl, a square, an adz, a broad-axe and a chalk-line and hew out the frame for a building of any size, as constructed during his lifetime in that part of the country. After he was sixty years of age, he hewed out the timber for a mill, four stories in height, which is still standing near the old home at Sisson-

## A PROPHET WITHOUT HONOR

ville. The timber was hauled to the mill yard and there laid out with a square and chalk-line, the mortices and the pins being hewed out after the manner of the construction of the Mormon Tabernacle at Salt Lake City by the pioneers of that early day.

The settlement of the family at Sissonville in the early fifties was followed by the construction of a home, then a mill, then a store, all of which was the handiwork of Ira A. Humphreys and over which he presided for many years until his death. During the period of reconstruction following the Civil War, there was apparently little ahead for the boy Albert but to follow in his father's footsteps and—bar those few months out of each year which were devoted to a common school education—he learned to run the mill, "tend store" and occasionally pilot a log raft down the Pocataligo River, colloquially known as the "Poca," this latter by reason of his father's having successfully embarked in the lumber business with which the youngster had become quite as familiar as he was with the store and the mill.

When a little past fifteen, the boy Albert

## THE PIONEER

decided that he wanted to become a school teacher. That mechanical genius which had manifested itself in the life of his grandfather Spicer Humphreys, had "broken out" in the boy in the shape of a passion for mathematics; as his schoolmates put it, he "just et compound fractions and could do sums in his sleep." Accordingly, his father sent him for a term at Marshall College at Huntington, West Virginia, that being all the training necessary to capture the job of teaching the district school at Sigmond's School House, Poca District. Just to put on a little polish, he attended the County Teachers' Institute at Charleston, West Virginia, where he secured a Teacher's No. 2 Certificate in September, 1876. The first Monday in November of that year found him duly installed at Sigmond's, five miles from Sissonville, age sixteen, salary twenty-five dollars per month, boarding at the house of the trustee who got him the job at the H. C. of L.—\$1.25 per week.

Now, it happens down in that particular part of the country—or at least it did in those good old days—that all country elec-



THE HUMPHREYS HOMESTEAD AT SISSONVILLE



## A PROPHET WITHOUT HONOR

tions are held in the district schoolhouses. On Tuesday, therefore, following the first day of his incumbency, the school was dismissed and Sigmond's fount of learning was turned into a brawling election booth. History doesn't say whether the young professor resented the profanation or whether the trustee raised the rent on him after the first day's board; at any rate—young Albert, on going down to the schoolhouse on the morning of election day, decided that he didn't want to teach school any longer. Having paid his board one week in advance, however, he stuck it out to the end of the week when he walked back to Sissonville and resumed his place in the store, the mill, the log-rafts, and the home. "*Sic transit gloria mundi!*" His father smiled indulgently as the young lad returned to the paternal roof-tree and took his old place as the chief assistant of the whole outfit. Incidentally he showed his appreciation by taking his son into partnership.

He is a wise father who knows when to let the reins lie loose over the dashboard and when to check the young speedster up sharp.

## THE PIONEER

Apparently Ira Humphreys knew his boy pretty well for from that time young Albert's development, both physically and mentally, was rapid enough for the most ambitious father. During the next three years he shot up to over six feet in stature, being built in proportion. He became a shrewd trader. He knew how to deal with the people in his territory. He became a keen student of human nature and developed exceptional salesmanship ability in addition to his shrewdness as a buyer. There was one thing he never forgot, however, and that was the capacity to put himself in the other man's place and judge accordingly. Fairness was his cardinal virtue and his reputation went before him wherever he had dealings. His word was as good as his bond and deals involving thousands of dollars passed through his hands without even a line to record them. Young Humphreys was coming into his own and everybody was glad, most of all his father who looked to him now to bear the burden and the heat of the day. It was fine; it was splendid. The eleven years that elapsed from the date of the partnership to 1887 saw

## A PROPHET WITHOUT HONOR

the mercantile end of the business, the milling and the lumber expanded to their fullest capacity, including the addition of the buying and selling of livestock. The importance of the lumber business took precedence over everything else. Young Humphreys, who was then twenty-seven years old, had developed into a successful speculator in timber lands. He was handling the timber output of the whole surrounding country. He had his own lumber camps and at the same time was acting as middleman for men who were his competitors but who, knowing of his unswerving fidelity to truth and principle, preferred to put their deals through him even though he was their competitor.

The Humphreys' rafts went down the Kanawha, the Ohio, and the lower Ohio rivers by the thousands and were sold to sawmills scattered all the way from Catlettsburg to Cincinnati and Louisville. Their transactions ran into the hundreds of thousands of dollars for which the Humphreys Company took in settlement the notes of the milling companies with which they dealt. And then one day, something happened; on

## THE PIONEER

March 11, 1887, a large milling concern in Cincinnati of whose paper the Humphreys Company held a large amount, failed; the failure brought about the failure of a similar concern, both of which handled the great majority of the Humphreys' business, amounting to a total of \$400,000. One of these companies paid ten cents on the dollar, the other paid nothing. The actual liabilities of the Humphreys Company to the people for whom it was acting as middleman amounted to \$12,000. The crash wiped out the Humphreys estate and left the young man Albert in debt more than \$200,000. Quite a problem for a young man of twenty-seven, particularly as he was not the kind of a man to go through bankruptcy and proposed to pay off every dollar with interest, which he finally did, after working several years for what is familiarly known as a "dead horse."

It is an iron law of the world's welfare that only those ought to be saved who can accomplish their own salvation. Educate the people of all lands in sanitation, preventive medicine, and all phases of the healing art

## A PROPHET WITHOUT HONOR

—and when they have so far progressed that they understand these things, believe in them, and practice them voluntarily, they will have become fit for salvation from pestilence and unsanitary lives—not before. The point I wish to make is that Albert Humphreys, under the impact of such a crushing blow—and especially at that youthful period of his life—could not possibly, then and there, have heroically resolved to clear up his debts. Such resolutions, made at such times, are more apt to be hysterical than otherwise. The only thing that saved him and his idealism was the fact that he had never considered such a possibility as susceptible to more than one solution. To avail himself of the protection that the law throws around a man who fails honestly never entered his mind for an instant. To fail to pay a dollar that he owed was unthinkable on the face of it. There was no possible excuse or reason that would have satisfied a man built on his lines. His whole upbringing as a lad and his experience as a business man revolted at the very thought of repudiating an obligation whether or not he was morally responsible. He could

## THE PIONEER

have contemplated suicide just as easily as he could have considered an excuse for not paying his debts. In other words, he met that issue theoretically years before and had planned his life upon it and the only thing for him to do was to see it through, that's the way he was constructed. Our American youth may be thankful for such examples of lofty idealism combined with innate integrity —they are rare, very rare.

It is essential to any considerable satisfaction with life that a man should have some spiritual impulse. There must burn or at least smolder in him some spark of preference for truth, some prejudice, unsuborned, in favor of righteousness. It is impossible to make life successful on a purely material basis. The picture will bear another stroke of the brush; can you, young man or oldster before whose eye this page may pass, imagine yourself "broke" at the age of twenty-seven and in debt \$200,000 at the same time, with your mind fully settled upon paying the debt as a matter of course and not even considering the possibility of avoiding it, especially as your own moral responsibility was not



THE OLD GRIST MILL AT SISSONVILLE



## A PROPHET WITHOUT HONOR

involved? Don't all speak at once, the Recording Angel is listening.

Here is a good place to bring in a bit of reminiscence, expressed in Mr. Humphreys' own words, covering this dark period of his life and the bright ray of light shot into it through the medium of that friendship and confidence between man and man which is one of the beautiful things of earth:

"I remember the morning after my failure," said he, "when the world seemed the darkest in history to me. I hardly knew where to turn. I felt that the world was against me, that every man would look on me as a bankrupt, as a failure,—a man in whom business men could place no confidence. Frankly, I would just as soon have the word Criminal branded on my back as the word Bankrupt, without reference to the merits of the case. But—as I argued with myself, the only thing for me to do was to go to work and get the money together to pay my debts. One of the first men that I called upon was C. C. Lewis, of Charleston, West Virginia. He was a wholesale grocer—one of the firm of P. H. Noyes & Company. I owed them

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\$1,367. I did not have a dollar, either in the bank or in my pocket. I had stripped myself completely and turned everything over to my assignees. I told the two members of the firm—Messrs. Lewis and Noyes—that I did not want them to worry about what I was owing them; being a young man with many good working years ahead, I felt sure I would pay every dollar I owed them.

“Mr. Lewis turned to me and said: ‘Don’t worry about what you owe this firm. If we have anything that you need in the way of funds or friendly assistance in working out your problem, or if we can help you in any way to secure money to rebuild your business, remember that we *are* your real friends, and all you have to do is to command us.’

“For nearly four years, I tried to ‘beat back’ in my home country. I would secure options at from \$2 to \$5 per acre, on land upon which vast tracts of valuable virgin timber stood and in which there were four or five seams of bituminous coal from four to seven feet in thickness, with oil and gas possibilities, land that is to-day worth \$150 to \$200 per acre—and I tried to interest the

## A PROPHET WITHOUT HONOR

leading business men of Charleston in the future of the wonderful country in which these properties were located, some of them less than twenty-five miles from Charleston, on the principal waterways flowing into the Kanawha.

"Their only reply to my appeal for help in handling these wonderfully attractive propositions was a skeptical smile and a little fatherly advice to let such wild-cat speculations alone. It was then that I said to myself: 'I'm a prophet without honor in my own country. I can never pay my debts if I remain in Kanawha.' Then I turned my face to the great Northwest and moved to Duluth, Minnesota." And it is worthy of note that he did not go alone. That dark year of 1887 was brightened by his wedding with Miss Alice K. Boyd of Ripley, Ohio, on November 3d. In all her husband's varying fortunes, down to the present day, Mrs. Humphreys has been a helpmeet in the truest sense of the word, which her temperamental partner jovially attests in the lingo of his profession: "Absolutely the richest strike I ever made." She brought him two

## THE PIONEER

stalwart sons: Ira Boyd, born February 18, 1890, and Albert E., junior, born October 18, 1893, both of whom are actively interested in their father's business. A third son, William, born in May, 1896, died in infancy.

## CHAPTER III

### A HAZARD OF NEW FORTUNES

“Hast thou forgot the open way,  
The winding way, the wandering way,  
With freedom of strong sun and rain  
To clear the roving heart of pain?”

THAT is an eloquent story told of the Mississippi River pilot who was asked by a passenger if he knew all the shoals and sand bars in the river. “Yes,” he answered, “I have been stuck on every one of ‘em.” What more blessed teacher is there than Dame Experience? Preachers come and preachers go, our elders lay down the law before our childlike and trusting natures; we listen and we believe and—straightway we are off to do a little experimenting “on our own,” just as our fathers did before us. And—when we get our fingers burnt, the elders are prone to look wise and forget that they did the self-same thing themselves in their salad days.

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If they didn't, then they're not fit to be our elders, that's all. We know only that portion of the world which we have traveled over; and we are never a whit wiser than our own experiences. And so it comes about that a man measures everything by his own foot-rule; that if he is ignoble, all the ignobleness in the world looks out upon him and claims kindred with him; if noble, all the nobleness in the world does the like. Shakespeare is always the same height with his reader.

In the minds of some men, youth is a crime, mistakes are something never to be forgotten, and "the law and the prophets" consists principally in concealing one's weaknesses from one's fellow men—just as if it could be done for any great length of time. And so we see that Charleston's business men could not forget that Albert Humphreys had failed. Praises be! we look at such failures as his a little differently to-day. In this generation we like to feel that a man to whom we entrust our money has "been down the line," run afoul of the sand bars, stubbed his toe, and done his share of floundering around before he found himself. In short, we'll take a

## A HAZARD OF NEW FORTUNES

chance on a practical man who knows the pitfalls of his business but heaven deliver us from the theorist and the "sure-thing" man. Indeed, it's not an uncommon thing to-day to hear the question propounded in reference to a man whose record is being investigated: "Has he ever been through a failure?" In other words—"can he stand the gaff?" Unfortunately for themselves and the progress of their own fair city, the Charleston wiseacres, by reason of their narrow view and unsympathetic attitude, forced a young man of unsullied honor, indomitable energy and pride, who had the greatest incentive in the world to prove his real qualities right there in his own town, to seek pastures new.

Albert Humphreys left Charleston and the next place we find him in is the city of Duluth, Minnesota. He went there, primarily, to look up an investment proposition at the suggestion of a friend. While there his attention was called to the possibilities of the country immediately north of Duluth, at that time commonly known as the Vermillion and Mesaba Iron Ranges. Being a natural-born pioneer he went up to "spy out the

## THE PIONEER

land" and while spending the night in a renovated bunk-house called, for the lack of a better term, a hotel, he overheard a conversation between three lumberjacks who were playing penny ante beneath the smoky rays of an old kerosene lamp, with white beans for chips:

"I wish I had some money and knew John McKinley," said one.

"Why?" said the other.

"Well," rejoined the first speaker, "I was coming across country to-day, packing through from the west of the Range, and I noticed in the northwest quarter of Township 58, Range 16, some mighty fine iron ore. John McKinley is so busy cutting timber that I guess he never stops to think of the value of the ore on his property. I could tell him something about it if I had any money to back up my story"—and the little game went on while Humphreys lay there in his bunk repeating over in his mind: "Northwest quarter, Section 2, 58-16." The next day found him back in Duluth, looking up John McKinley. He located him in a brief half-day and secured a thirty-day option on

## A HAZARD OF NEW FORTUNES

twelve forty-acre tracts of land valued at \$60,000 for which he gave his check for \$1,000. Inside of a couple of hours more he had engaged a mining engineer and two men, started them for the Range with the necessary equipment, tools, etc., to open a camp and locate a pit near the spot described, and report thirty days later to him in Duluth on his return from Charleston. Then our enterprising young friend caught the evening train out of Duluth in order to beat the arrival of his \$1,000 check on a Charleston bank, if so be he might be lucky enough to get the money together to meet it, not to mention the \$59,000 due thirty days later. He managed to raise \$25,000 amongst some of his old Charleston friends and in thirty days was back in Duluth with enough money to compromise with John McKinley on three forty-acre tracts at \$25,000 instead of twelve at \$60,000 and the lease was signed. During the next few days a company was organized with 125,000 shares of capital stock at \$2.50 per share of which John McKinley bought 12,000 shares himself for which he paid \$6,000 in cash and returned Mr. Humphreys' notes

## THE PIONEER

for \$24,000—a total transaction of \$30,000, which deal eventually made McKinley a wealthy man. Meanwhile a large deposit of that fine iron ore which has made the name Mesaba famous the world over, had been located by the Humphreys' engineering corps. Within thirty days the stock was selling for five dollars per share and the first boom the great Mesaba Iron Range had ever known was being flashed from the Atlantic to the Pacific. The tide had turned for Humphreys. Within ninety days after he landed in Duluth on his first trip from Charleston, he had at his disposal, any hour of the day, a special train starting either from Minneapolis or Duluth carrying parties of investors to the Mesaba Range country, and—it may be said—quite a number of them were from the vicinity of Charleston, including some gentlemen who “always knew Albert Humphreys would make his mark in the world, yes siree.” All of which calls to mind a sage observation of that clever New York journalist Don Marquis:

“It is better to go swaggering through the gates of life loose-lipped and genial and

## A HAZARD OF NEW FORTUNES

greedy, embracing pleasures and suffering pains, than to find oneself in the midst of caution, incontinently slain by chance and eaten by worms."

Paraphrasing Emerson's famous epigram, I wish to remark that all the world loves a fighter. Albert Humphreys looks back on the days of darkness in Sissonville in 1887 with a tolerant smile to-day. He can afford to. He found out long ago that, as Herbert Spencer has it: "The man of higher type must be content with greatly moderated expectations. He has to see how comparatively little can be done and yet to find it worth while to do that little well." Truly, there is no millennium for minnows and he is a foolish man who allows too much of his thought to be taken up with those who find it so easy to float downstream with the dead ones. Only a live fish undertakes to work his way upstream. These are the qualities of the thoroughbred—the man who sticks to the finish. Because we are men and not beasts of the field we are all more or less inspired by the daily thought that our lives should not be lived in vain. To the extent that good breed-

## THE PIONEER

ing or a kindly Providence brings it to our minds, we occasionally ask ourselves how we can make the most of this little span between the daylight and the dark. One way that is open to each and every one of us is to cultivate some little germ of a vision. The old prophet spoke much wiser than he knew when he said: "Where there is no vision the people perish." We can take the risk of being considered good; we'll take a chance on what our neighbor thinks; but we cannot look ourselves in the face every morning when we brush our hair without occasionally wondering whether we are doing anything of importance to anybody but ourselves. If we are really going to accomplish anything worth while, we must make ourselves bigger mentally and spiritually because little men do but little good. These are some of the reasons why Humphreys has kept himself close to the soil. He knows the inspiration of close contact with old Mother Earth. He might have been a successful manufacturer or merchant, but—he chose that work that kept him in harmony with a big and constantly widening horizon, and thereby delivered him-

## A HAZARD OF NEW FORTUNES

self from many of the carping littlenesses of life. He never forgot his "private dream," he never drew on his principal except when he had compounded it with a vision that merged his own spirit with that of his less fortunate brother and thus brought him up to a firmer footing instead of descending to his less hopeful level. His vision has been an infinitely more lofty and vigorous one on that account—and his earnest desire to make two blades of grass grow where but one grew before has enabled others to see that his was a creative vision, not a selfish one, that it was no will o' the wisp but a very real thing. Humphreys would have preferred to remain in Charleston for no other reason than that he loves the fighting line. Nothing would have given him greater pleasure than to prove to those who had put him down for a failure that they were wrong. But it was not until he came back from the Mesaba country with a proposition so palpably good and worth while that a child could grasp it that they were ready to believe. Poor old human nature! He is always looking for a "sign." There

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must be a miracle performed. Some one must rise from the dead. Doubting Thomas must be convinced in his own peculiar way.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE BUILDER AT WORK

"Yes, your 'Never-never country'—Yes, your 'edge of cultivation'

And 'no sense in going further'—till I crossed the range  
to see.

God forgive me! No *I* didn't. It's God's present to  
our nation.

Anybody might have found it but—His Whisper came  
to me."

KIPLING.

WHEN that great empire-builder Cecil Rhodes graduated from Oxford University his old professor asked him what he was going to do.

"I'm going down to South Africa to make money," was the prompt reply.

"Is that all your university training means to you, that it sends you out into the world simply to make money?" queried his instructor.

"It's this way, Professor," rejoined the

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young man: "I have some ideals in my mind that I would like to see carried out before I die—and it takes money to carry out ideals."

This is a true story and it illustrates the constructive as well as the romantic character of the pioneer wherever we find him. Sometimes he does not recognize the latter trait himself—but it's there just the same. And quite as often, when he does recognize it he'll keep it in the background, frequently to the point of denying its existence.

During the five years which elapsed from Humphreys' first trip to the Mesaba Iron Range in the fall of 1891, he discovered mines the ore of which is to-day worth more than one hundred millions of dollars. In a comparatively short time he cleaned up enough money to pay off the two hundred thousand dollars which remained from the Humphreys Lumber Company failure in Sissonville in 1887. By this time he had become an operator on a large scale and was hailed by his former critics in Charleston's business circles as a good man to tie to. How easy it is for some of us to make a virtue out of our former detestation! Yea, verily! especially if there's

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any money to be made as a result thereof. In June, 1892, Humphreys took a party of Charleston men out into the Mesaba country just to look around and see what they could see. Among them was Colonel Robert Carr, a lifelong friend with whom he had gone fishing from boyhood days. While traveling through the country with a pack train they came upon a beautiful little lake which Humphreys had often noted on the map. The beach was composed of pure white sand and the water clear as crystal. Turning to his old friend, Humphreys said: "Uncle Bob, it looks like there ought to be some fish in that lake."

Uncle Bob 'lowed that there might be. It was the work of less than an hour to build a raft sufficiently buoyant to hold the two men. Fishing tackle was found in Humphreys' "war sack" and the two buddies were soon out in the middle of the lake hauling in some of the finest pickerel that ever snapped at a piece of fat pork. After they had "boiled the kettle" and the fish were properly stowed away where kindly Nature intended they should be, Humphreys and Uncle Bob took a little walk around the lake and ascended a hill

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on the farther side, from which there was a gorgeous view of the valley below.

"That looks to me like a mighty fine town site, down there in the valley," said Humphreys. "It sure does that," agreed Uncle Bob. "I believe we could sell building lots in a spot like that to a deaf, dumb, and blind man," said Humphreys.

"Any one who couldn't see the value of that sort of a town site ought to have his head examined," asseverated Uncle Bob. "That settles it," said Humphreys, "we'll just start something as soon as we get back to Duluth and we'll name the town after our native State—Virginia."

In less than a week Humphreys had his engineers on the spot, surveyed it, cut streets through the tamarack swamp where, notwithstanding summer weather, solid ice, three feet in thickness, was found some three feet below the débris which had doubtless been frozen hundreds of years before. The town was mapped and plotted without delay and in six weeks sales of lots had taken place to the value of \$26,000. Before Christmas a railroad was built into the town. To-day the

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city of Virginia, Minnesota, is the terminus of five railroads, has a population of 25,000, boasts one of the largest sawmills in the world, some of the greatest iron mines, and is one of the richest and most prosperous towns in the State. The profane and uninitiate of life see no romance in such an accomplishment. The pioneer knows better.

Somewhere in one of his essays that arch pessimist Schopenhauer delivers himself of a genial and comforting statement to the effect that if a young man starting out on his career could by some miraculous agency have the Book of Life opened before him, he would willingly lie down and die rather than proceed in the face of the difficulties that he was destined to encounter. It is a mere truism to state that if Albert Humphreys could have foreseen the panic of 1893 he would have trimmed his sails to meet it. It is equally true that if he had been a "sure thing" man he would never have left Sissonville. His splendid development work went straight ahead and a number of additional mines were opened in the Mesaba Range until the panic "came down like a wolf on the fold" and

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stopped, as by a blight, all development and railroad building in that tremendous country. At that time he owned and was developing mining properties which are to-day worth more than \$100,000,000, the market value of which dropped to a comparatively paltry \$1,000,000 almost over night.

It was about this period of time that large combinations of capital were beginning to make themselves felt in our industrial development, and the way they operated is a very familiar story to most of us. This little narrative contemplates no disquisition on economics. Human nature is much the same the world over. Man in the aggregate is no altruist and the creative faculty cuts mighty little figure with the folk who are constantly ringing the changes on that dry old saw: "money talks." Albert Humphreys is an individualist, pure and simple. He never could subordinate his wondrous initiative to working for a corporation unless the corporation happened to be himself. And when a man opens his books in the morning and closes them at night as if the Almighty Himself were standing at his elbow, he can afford

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to play a lone hand and expect the full and complete confidence of his associates at the same time. It doesn't necessarily follow, however, that such a man should hold himself both morally and financially responsible to those who trust their money in his hands. However, that is exactly the way Albert Humphreys regarded the situation and that is why, when he was caught in the panic of 1893 to the tune of \$1,200,000, he assumed the burden of making the loss good to his friends and creditors with the same steadfastness of purpose that he shouldered the \$200,000 failure of the Humphreys Lumber Company in 1887.

How the tragic workings-out of some of these great combinations have driven less brave and determined spirits than Albert Humphreys to ruin is a matter of contemporaneous history. The railroads to the Mesaba mines, the steamboat freight service on Lake Superior, and most of the mines themselves having been acquired by the Lake Superior Consolidated Company (later a United States Steel Corporation subsidiary) and controlled by John D. Rockefeller and his associates, it

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followed in a comparatively short time that the "Consolidated" was delivering iron ore in Cleveland, Ohio, at \$1.90 per ton, or 50 cents less per ton than individual operators like Humphreys could mine and deliver it from their own properties. Long-time contracts were made at the \$1.90 per ton rate and just enough ore was sold to establish that price—no considerable tonnage being mined at the time. It inevitably followed as a matter of course that the maintenance of that rate necessarily destroyed the market value of mining properties of lesser importance, and when the panic came it compelled Humphreys to sell his choicest properties, comprising thousands of acres along the Mesaba Range, for a song, all of which were bought in by the Rockefeller interests. Two pieces of property in particular which he sold for \$200,000 and \$400,000 respectively are to-day worth more than \$50,000,000.

The details of some of these transactions are so harrowing that no possible good could be accomplished by setting them down here. We all know that the doctrine of the survival

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of the fittest is one of the terrible commercial accomplishments of our latter-day civilization. Those powerful and unscrupulous men who played it to the limit in those dark days, that is to say, those who are left—have something to think about in these more recent times when the shoe is on the other foot and we are all suffering as a result. It is worthy of remark, however, that Albert Humphreys never allowed his tragic and bitter experiences to sour him. Furthermore, he believes in letting the dead past bury its dead, otherwise this modest chronicle would stir up a bunch of sleeping dogs that are better left to their questionable memories. Before turning our back upon the Mesaba Iron Range entirely, however, a brief history of the pioneers who discovered it and how they lost control of it may be worth while.

## CHAPTER V

### THE MESABA TRAIL BLAZERS

" Then welcome each rebuff  
That turns earth's smoothness rough,  
Each sting that bids nor sit, nor stand, but go!  
Be our joys three-parts pain!  
Strive, and hold cheap the strain;  
Learn, nor account the pang; dare, never grudge the throe!"

THE Mesaba Iron Range, extending from seventy-five to one hundred miles north and west of Duluth, is the most valuable and most productive series of iron mines in the world and produces over four-fifths of the iron ore mined in the United States. The wonderful discovery of these almost limitless deposits of iron ore was made by the Merritt brothers of Duluth in 1890. These Merritt brothers were the finest type of our latter-day pioneer —woodsmen with a fair amount of technical knowledge who went into the wilderness for the purpose of locating timber lands and iron



MINING IRON ORE IN THE MESABA



## THE MESABA TRAIL BLAZERS

mines. Their parents settled in the little town of Oneota, a few miles west of the present city of Duluth, in the late forties, although there was no such city in prospect at the time. These four men—Alfred, Leonidas, A. R., and C. C., were blazers of trails. They had great faith in that wondrous country, which they manifested by taking up vast tracts of land long before they had any idea of its tremendous importance as an iron-producing territory. Later, they located the well known Biwabik, Mountain Iron, and Mesaba Mountain mines. When these three great mines were opened, the Merritt brothers cast about to raise money to build the railroad referred to in the following chapter for the purpose of opening up that vast territory which lay about seventy-five miles from Duluth. They finally interested Chase Brothers and Daniel Grant of Faribault, Minnesota, who built a road from Cloquet, some miles west of Duluth, into the Mountain Iron and Biwabik mines. Ore shipments were being made by way of Superior, Wisconsin, at which port an iron-ore dock had been built during the construction of the railroad.

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Enters now upon the scene an individual by the name of Wetmore who came from the East and was supposed to represent Rockefeller interests. He seemed to be an able citizen with plenty of money. He got in good and strong with the Merritt brothers and was generally looked upon as their financial adviser. He induced them to organize the Lake Superior Consolidated Company, with a very large capital stock, and to transfer to this Company all their holdings on the Mesaba Iron Range, including their stock in the newly built railroad. The organization of this Company was made with a view to extending the Mesaba Railroad by what was to be known as the Cut-off, into the city of Duluth, cutting out Cloquet and the outlet by way of Superior, and to be followed by the building of enormous ore docks within the city limits of Duluth.

A bond issue of \$250,000 by the County of St. Louis and the City of Duluth was fathered by the Merritt brothers and was voted almost unanimously. The proceeds from the bond issue were used largely in the construction of the Cut-off and the iron ore docks. And, in

## THE MESABA TRAIL BLAZERS

order to raise further funds to complete the railroad and the ore docks, it was found necessary by the Merritt brothers to borrow large sums of money which were promptly furnished by Mr. Wetmore, the Merritt brothers, in turn, executing their obligations in favor of his principals who were supposed to be John D. Rockefeller and his associates. At the time of the transfer of the Merritt brothers' interests to the Consolidated Company, there were included by the Rockefeller interests certain Spanish-American and Gogebic properties, which were represented as dividend-paying and for which several millions of dollars in bonds were issued. All of these properties were found after a short time to be worthless, as they were actually non-dividend paying, and (like other properties outside the combination already mentioned) had been rendered practically bankrupt and without market value by the discovery of the Mesaba deposits which could be mined so cheaply as to render foreign competition impossible.

The railroad was built and the docks completed. And then—the African of High

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Finance who had been hiding in the traditional woodpile came out from under and smilingly showed himself and this is what was revealed: the ore, which had been taken over by the Consolidated and by other interests with which that company was associated, was marketed at prices so low that it ruined the market value of the Consolidated mine stock. And so—when the obligations of the Merritt brothers matured, the properties were earning nothing, the stock non-dividend in character, and the Merritts found themselves absolutely at the mercy of the owners of their notes, payment for which was demanded at maturity. The old, old story! The labor of years gone for naught. The survival of the fittest indeed!

With one exception this terrific blow practically wiped out the Merritt family as an industrial asset in the State of Minnesota. C. C. Merritt went insane and died; A. R. Merritt left Duluth and for years has been working on a ranch in Idaho. Leonidas Merritt holds a minor office in the employ of the City of Duluth to-day. Of their individual contemporaries engaged in the

## THE MESABA TRAIL BLAZERS

same kind of developmental work in the Mesaba country who were caught in the '93 panic, Col. E. C. Gridley died almost penniless, Judge James T. Hale has long been an employee of the State on a modest salary, while A. J. Trimble and Capt. Frank Hibbing, who had been operating on the Gogebic and other ranges on the south shore of Lake Superior, died practically "broke."

There were two survivors of this *débâcle* who never lost their nerve: Albert E. Humphreys and Alfred Merritt. The latter brought suit against Mr. Rockefeller for collusion, misrepresentation, etc., and finally secured a judgment in the United States District Court in Duluth for \$940,000, which was reversed by the United States Circuit Court at St. Paul. Following this reversal, payment of the notes was demanded by the Rockefeller interests with the result that the securities attached to the notes were sacrificed and the stock of the Consolidated Company taken over at something less than ten dollars per share. In passing, it is worthy of comment that when, some six or seven years later, the United States Steel

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Corporation was organized, the stock of the Consolidated Company was turned in on the basis of \$218 per share. A pretty bit of financing, indeed. Of Messrs. Humphreys and Merritt it might be said—

“Fate might cast them in the pit—  
Fate could never make them quit.”

Both of them, being of that rather unusual tribe—good losers, took their losses stoically, accepted the inevitable and put the whole miserable experience behind their backs. Merritt started all over again and recouped his fortunes by making new discoveries on the Mesaba and the Vermillion ranges, while Humphreys turned his face toward British Columbia.

During the trial of this celebrated case it developed that one of the Merritt brothers, L. J. Merritt by name, who was a local banker, owned a large number of the Merritt brothers' securities. L. J. was doing business under the name of L. J. Merritt & Son, Bankers. While the case was on trial and before the compromise was reached, it developed, much to the surprise of the residents of Duluth, that the firm of L. J. Merritt

## THE MESABA TRAIL BLAZERS

& Son, Bankers, figured that its interests would be much better conserved on board the Rockefeller dreadnaught than in the frail shallop in which the fighting Merritt brothers had embarked. At any rate, it was not long before L. J. Merritt closed up his banking business in Duluth and, accompanied by his family, emigrated to Pasadena, California, where he has been living for many years in greater luxury than he ever displayed in Duluth. But the people of Duluth will never forget the presentment made by the attorney for the Merritt brothers before the jury that rendered the verdict in their favor. The eloquent advocate drew a picture of an adventurous ship loaded with treasure and navigated by the very kind of men whose pioneering fearlessness and initiative made the United States what it is to-day, floating peacefully on its way to a safe harbor when a storm signal was given. The one man on the vessel who had never had a hand in winning the treasure with which the ship was loaded but who had profited by the creative work of its officers, was the first to slip over the side into the Rockefeller yawl from which he was

## THE PIONEER

hoisted to the decks of the good old ship *Safety First*. Verily! Verily! "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

In closing this chapter on the Mesaba, it is not too much to say that had it not been for the discovery of these wondrously productive mines, together with the very railroads the Merritt brothers built, we would, without doubt, have lost the great World War. The Mesaba Iron Range, during the years of the war, produced and shipped to the lower Lakes, from where it was distributed to the various furnaces and steel plants of the country, more than thirty-five million tons of ore per year—or more than all the ore ranges of the United States combined. The Mesaba Iron Range constitutes the foundation of the greatest corporation of all times: United States Steel, whose holdings to-day on this wonderful range alone, after having been mined for twenty-five years, are worth more than a billion of dollars—worth more than all the preferred stock, common stock and the bonded indebtedness combined, of the whole corporation itself.

## CHAPTER VI

### UNDER A NEW FLAG

“Change was his mistress, Chance his counselor.  
Love could not keep him, Duty forged no chain.  
The wide seas and the mountains called to him,  
And gray dawns saw his campfires in the rain.”

It's no small indictment of one's own country to be compelled to leave it because of the difficulty of getting a square deal. It must be confessed, however, that is precisely the reason why Albert Humphreys turned his back upon the Mesaba country and went up into that wonderful part of British Columbia traversed by that picturesque enlargement of the Columbia River known as the Arrow Lakes, which extend south from the main line of the Canadian Pacific Railway at Revelstoke into the Crow's Nest Pass country. In that Nature's Wonderland the mountains run up from the water side at such an angle that the passing steamers have been

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known to pick up a farmer who stubbed his toe and fell off his farm into the lake, a little drop of anywhere from five hundred to one thousand feet: at least that is one of the stories they tell the trustful traveler. And it's worth being taken for an unsophisticated "rube" to go up into those godlike mountains and invite your soul.

Feeling that it was useless to try and recoup his fortunes in the Mesaba, Humphreys went up into the Kootenay country and bought some gold, silver, and lead mines which he developed and sold to a syndicate of Scotsmen from Edinburgh. He built the first concentrating mill in the Slocan District and was one of the pioneers in opening up mining interests throughout that whole section. He found British Columbia to be one of the safest places in the world in which to do business. He found that the territorial government was on the lookout for blackmailing lawyers and claim-jumpers. He found an absolutely fair administration of the laws and that the authorities welcomed constructive and inventive genius and held forth every inducement to the real pioneer,

## UNDER A NEW FLAG

backed by the utmost protection of his productive work and the money he invested. He found the Gold Commissioner a bulwark of defense against all the chicanery that had made possible such a colossal injustice as he and his fellow pioneers had suffered in the Mesaba country. He found lawlessness unknown and the same degree of protection accorded to life and property in the wilderness as might be expected in the most populous city. He spent two years developing the property which he finally sold and then the longings for home overcame him and he decided not only to return to the States, but to the scenes of his youth down in the old State of Virginia. But, whoever heard of a pioneer reaching his ultimate destination except by a more or less circuitous route! As Kipling expresses it in the greatest bit of pioneer verse ever written, *The Voortrekker*:

"He shall come back on his own track, and by his scarce-cooled camp

There shall he meet the roaring street, the derrick and the stamp."

On his way out of the Kootenay country in 1895, after he had closed up his mining

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interests, intending to make his way into the States via the Spokane Falls & Northern Railway from Northport, Washington, the boat on which he was traveling down the Arrow Lakes stopped for the night at a little landing known as Trail Creek, it being unsafe for the lake steamers to undertake to navigate the swirling currents of the Columbia River after nightfall. And here follows a story which for real romance is unmatched by anything I have ever read. Of course, it goes without saying that Humphreys doesn't see any romance in it—the real romancer never does; he gets "so close to the trees that he can't see the forest" and it is all so absolutely natural to him that he does as he does as a matter of course. This particular narrative is so thoroughly representative of the man that I am going to let him tell the story in his own words, just as he told it to me:

"After the boat had been tied up to the dock, which consisted of a few pine boards nailed to a few piles, our party, consisting of five men, including myself, took a walk on shore before darkness came down. It looked

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like a mighty fine town site to me and an ideal spot from which to build a very necessary railroad into the town of Rossland, a mining camp several miles away. On our return from the walk, we stepped into the only building there, which was used as a hotel by men going to and from the mines at Rossland, and I asked the proprietor (a Mr. Topping) who owned the land roundabout his hotel, to which he replied promptly that *he* did, that the land was his preëmption, whereupon the following conversation took place":

"How many acres have you?"

"Some three or four hundred," he said.

"Why don't you build a town here?"

"Well," he said, "I surveyed it one time and sold six lots at ten dollars apiece. They never even paid the expenses of the survey."

"Then I asked him: 'Why don't you give some one half of it to build a smelter here and a railroad up to Rossland?'

"I have been looking for that man for some time," was his reply.

"You see him now," I said, "looking right at you."

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“‘Do you mean it?’ he asked.

“‘Yes,’ said I.

“‘Then,’ replied he, ‘the job is yours. I will give you half of my holdings here if you will built a smelter and a railroad. After supper we will draw up an agreement.’

“After supper the agreement was drawn and signed and the next day we finished our trip to Spokane.

“On my arrival in Spokane, in looking over my mail, I found a telegram from Augustus Heinze—in those days one of the biggest copper men in the West—asking this question: ‘Where can Jim Breen see you?’

“I replied: ‘You had better come, yourself.’

“Jim Breen was Heinze’s engineer. He was at Rossland looking for a smelter site on the night that I was at Trail Creek. Heinze had entered into a contract with one of the largest mines in the Rossland Camp—the Le Roy—to smelt 75,000 tons of ore at \$8.50 per ton f.o.b. the mine. Appreciating the fact that under ordinary circumstances he would have been compelled to haul the ore by wagon sixteen miles to Northport, thence by rail to Butte, Montana (an impossible

## UNDER A NEW FLAG

procedure at the rate quoted), he planned to build a smelter near the mine itself.

"When Jim Breen made his trip from Rossland down to Trail Creek the next morning fully expecting to make a deal for the only available smelter site in all that country for this particular camp, he found that Topping had delivered the town site to me.

"Heinze arrived in Spokane in two or three days, and his first question was: 'Humphreys, what are you going to do with that town site?'

"I replied: 'The Province of British Columbia will issue a handsome subsidy at the rate of \$3500 in cash per mile and 12,000 acres of selected timberland to anyone constructing railroads in the province. I purpose having some of my friends help me build that railroad and I'll take as my profit a one-half interest in the town site, as well as an interest in the railroad.'

"He replied: 'Give me an interest in the town site, and I will build the smelter, together with the railroad.'

"I asked: 'How much of an interest?'

"'Suppose we cut it into thirds,' said he,

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'you taking a third, Topping a third, and I will take a third.'

"I replied: 'We will send for Topping to make the deal.'

"We telephoned Rossland, sent a messenger back to Trail Creek, had Topping take the next boat coming to Northport, and from there by rail to Spokane. On his arrival we made the deal as outlined, and within four months we had 400 men at work on a smelter and the railroad and town lots were selling at from \$200 to \$600 each.

"One year after that time we had a meeting in Trail Creek, the name of our new town. In the interim we had sold a great number of lots and on this trip we divided the remaining unsold lots between us as follows: Heinze would choose ten, Topping ten, and then I would take ten, and then reverse—I taking the first choice, Topping the second and Heinze the third.

"We divided all the lots until some eighty-seven remained. Heinze suggested that we dump the eighty-seven into a 'Jack Pot' and play 'Freeze-Out,' the winner taking all the lots. We took matches for chips, two boxes

## UNDER A NEW FLAG

each. Topping lasted one deal. I lasted two. Heinze got the remaining lots!

"The next day, I met on the street a man by the name of R. T. Daniels.

"He asked: 'Humphreys, what will you take for your lots?'

"I named a price, spot cash.

"He replied, 'I will take them.'

"I made him a deed and he paid me the money.

"Several years after, I was walking the streets of Tulsa, Oklahoma, where I was operating in oil, and, looking across the street at a very handsome twelve-story building, I saw the name 'R. T. Daniels.' It carried me back to the good old days in British Columbia, and I said to myself: 'That must be my old friend,' and so it proved. We had a joyful reunion. This man Daniels, after leaving British Columbia, still on the track of the fleeting dollar, went to Florida, where he made a great deal of money, and from there to Tulsa when it was a small town. It is to-day one of the greatest oil centers in the world. He invested largely in real estate, has improved every piece of land

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he purchased and to-day is worth millions of dollars, notwithstanding which fact, he is the same busy, hardworking trader that he was when I first met him in British Columbia, back in 1895."

## CHAPTER VII

### BACK TO THE SOUTHLAND

“And I long for the dear old river,  
Where I dreamed my youth away;  
For a dreamer lives forever,  
And a toiler dies in a day.”

If you would gather some fleeting impression of the call of Home to the weary pioneer, turn with me to the record of the last trek into the wilderness of “the noblest Roman of them all,” he whose name will echo like a clarion in the heart of our American youth for generations to come: Colonel Theodore Roosevelt. You will find it in that tremendously interesting story of his canoe trip down the River of Doubt as described in his last book: *Through the Brazilian Wilderness*. Weakened by fever, crippled by an abscess on his leg, practically down and out, spending his days stretched on the boxes in the bottom of a small open dugout, under the

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well-nigh intolerable heat of the tropical sun, varied by blinding, drenching downpours of rain, his heart went back to his native land and to his own hearthstone in the most exquisite outburst of homesickness it has ever been my good fortune to read. Listen:

“In our home country spring had now come, the wonderful northern spring of long glorious days, of brooding twilights, of cool, delightful nights. Robin and bluebird, meadow-lark and song sparrow, were singing in the mornings at home; the maple-buds were red; wind-flowers and bloodroot were blooming while the last patches of snow still lingered; the rapture of the hermit-thrush in Vermont, the serene, golden melody of the wood-thrush on Long Island, would be heard before we were there to listen. Each man to his home, and to his true love! Each was longing for the homely things that were so dear to him, for the home people who were dearer still, and for the one who was dearest of all.”

Humphreys had been away from his beloved South for five years; he had passed through the most trying experience of his



ON THE POCATALIGO RIVER



## BACK TO THE SOUTHLAND

life in the Mesaba country, had gotten on his feet again in British Columbia and wanted to go back home, yes, even to the local bankers who would find it easier to say "I told you so" in reference to the Mesaba, before they even found out what he had accomplished in the Kootenay country as a gold and silver miner and as the practical builder of Trail Creek and the railroad thence to Rossland. 'Twas ever thus! The fall of 1897 found him back in Charleston and looking around for something to do. This time he didn't try to interest old friends, local capitalists or anyone else. He took some of his own money and purchased a large tract of coal land on the Norfolk & Western Railroad, built a short line of railroad into it, and then leased a large section thereof to a Lynchburg syndicate. After nineteen years of mining, they have barely scratched the surface of the immense coal deposits located in that tract.

Later on Humphreys' attention was called to a vast tract of coal land on what is known as Cabin Creek, on the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad, not far from Charleston, in which two comparatively unimportant mines,

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located a short distance from the mouth of the Creek, had been for many years operated by a Pennsylvania concern which had built a short spur of railway track from the main line of the C. & O. to their mines, thereby bottling up all that tremendous acreage which it was making no attempt to develop. Furthermore—by virtue of their control of this short line these “capitalists” quoted an arbitrary freight rate of ten cents per ton over and above the main line rate, to any persons desirous of opening up the country beyond their mines—a prohibitive proposition on the face of it. For over fifteen years certain Charleston business men had looked longingly at this luscious plum, realizing its limitless possibilities in coal but, for some reason or other, had never been able to accomplish anything with the owners of that little railroad which blocked further exploitation of the wonderful country beyond. It wasn’t long after Humphreys’ return from British Columbia, however, before he organized a syndicate, purchased the little railroad and presented it to the Chesapeake and Ohio with the understanding that they would

## BACK TO THE SOUTHLAND

extend it several miles further up the valley, and accord a main line rate for hauling all the coal mined. The result of this characteristically constructive move was to open up 250,000 acres of new coal lands with a capacity of a billion tons of coal brought to the very door of the C. & O. Railway. In less than a year after the closing of this deal, practically every section of land on that great Cabin Creek tract was leased, a big portion of which has been mined uninterruptedly ever since without any apparent diminution of the supply. This is what is known to-day as the famous Carbon Fuel Company, one of the most successful bituminous coal mining concerns in the South.

By this time Humphreys had gotten to be a national figure in the bituminous coal mining field, and in the South he was recognized as an authority. During that same eventful year of 1901, he was approached by P. L. Kimberly, the well-known Chicago Iron Ore King, with a view to having him investigate some presumably valuable coal lands on one of the tributaries of the Big Sandy River in Kentucky. This would have been Hum-

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phreys' opportunity to go down into that country and operate along the lines of Mr. Wetmore who figured so actively with the Merritt brothers in the Mesaba several years previous, for there was a large number of individual prospectors already on the job. To the everlasting credit of Humphreys, however, when these individual operators, many of whom were men of small means, saw him on his investigating tour, they knew whatever happened, his work would be clean and no man would be subjected to the usual operation of the "steam-roller." As a result of his survey he organized the Northern Coal & Coke Company, with a capital stock of \$500,000. He assembled 100,000 acres of land, bunched for the greater part, with the expectation of building a railroad from Pikeville up to the head of Elkhorn Creek and to the north fork of the Kentucky River, which would enable them to open at least fifteen mines and make of it the greatest soft coal property in the world. To this end, the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad was to extend their road to Pikeville where a junction would be made with the Northern

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Coal & Coke Company's railroad from mines.

Humphreys' plans went through with Kimberly and his associates without a hitch and it was specifically understood that no more land should be bought beyond the 100,000 acres upon which the necessary options had been secured, that being the maximum amount of acreage they could profitably handle with the \$2,500,000 to \$3,000,000 they had agreed upon as a fixed investment to buy and open up that great tract of tremendously valuable coal land. Up to this time neither Mr. Kimberly nor his associates had visited this remarkable country; everything had been left to Humphreys. When, however, Kimberly did go down there with a few of his friends,—it was the old, old story: they wanted everything in sight. Despite their very explicit agreement with Humphreys, they turned about twelve option-takers loose in the country and by June, 1902, they had under option 360,000 acres of land scattered over half a dozen counties. Humphreys called a meeting of the company in Chicago, accused Kim-

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berly of violating his agreement, predicted the failure of the venture under the new conditions, by reason of their having bought themselves "land poor," prophesied they would never open a mine, never build a railroad, that their stockholders would quit them one by one and that the day would come when a few wise business men of wealth would cull from the 360,000 acres with which they had foolishly saddled themselves, the 100,000 he had purchased and carry the company through to a big success. Kimberly lost his temper and offered to buy Humphreys' interest on the spot, to which Humphreys agreed with alacrity and returned to Charleston.

After several years' struggle to perfect their titles and after selling off some of their outlying holdings at cost (the very parcels to the purchase of which Humphreys had so earnestly objected) they finally allowed the Consolidated Coal Company, of which the Watsons of Virginia and ex-Governor Fleming are large holders, to select the one hundred thousand acres which Humphreys had optioned, for which they paid the Northern Coal & Coke Company in common stock

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of the Consolidated. Since that time the Consolidated Coal Company has had two railroads built into the property: the Baltimore & Ohio from the Chesapeake and Ohio side, up the Big Sandy River; and the Louisville & Nashville from the North Fork of the Kentucky River side, and to-day it is, without doubt, one of the greatest coal properties in all the civilized world.

The story of the failure of this potentially successful company, the Northern Coal & Coke, would be incomplete without the setting down of one of Humphreys' experiences with some of the peculiar back-country folk or mountain men for which that part of Kentucky is famous. On one of his first trips into the country he drove with a party of friends from the terminus of the Big Sandy Branch of the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad, at a point called White House, to Pikeville, some eighty miles distant, whence they rode into the coal fields already mentioned. They spent their first night at the home of Ban Johnson, not far from Pikeville. A short time before their arrival in the country, a son-in-law of Johnson, Reynolds by name,

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had killed a man and a reward had been offered for his capture, by the Governor of the State, all of which the Humphreys party knew nothing. Johnson's home consisted of an old-fashioned log house weather-boarded on the outside and sealed within. Just as the party was about to blow out the light (there were six of them in one little room, two to a bed) Ban Johnson stuck his head in at the door-way and said laconically: "Boys, if you hear any shooting during the night, just get out of bed and lie down under the window-sill—the logs are thicker." He afterwards explained that his place was watched by officers of the law who hoped to catch his son-in-law Reynolds, and inasmuch as the young man was likely to show up in the middle of the night, in which event there might be some shooting, he didn't wish his guests to be taking any unnecessary chances.

The next morning Humphreys and his party, piloted by John Venters, one of the natives of the country and with whom they were to spend the next night, took saddle horses and rode up Shelby Creek to its head, crossed over the mountain and rode down to

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the North Fork of the Kentucky River. As they were riding through the low gap between the North Fork of the Kentucky and the head of the Elkhorn, late in the afternoon, they passed a lonely grave with two split rails along each side and two dropped across the ends. Venters, who was riding with Humphreys, said in an offhand manner: "That's the grave of Talt Hall. He was hanged up at the County Court House many years ago. I buried him myself. I'll tell you the story after supper." And it was a most extraordinary story indeed as will be seen from the following chapter.

No one but a Southerner who has been born and bred in that mystic mountain country, who has lived amongst those primitive and superstitious back-country folk and both understands and sympathizes with their limited vision, could tell the story of Talt Hall with such dramatic power and fidelity to detail. And when we consider that those peculiar people are a law unto themselves and really do live up to their lights, we can appreciate the tragic pathos of the dialogue which took place between Hall

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and his intimate friend John Venters to whom he looked for deliverance up to the last hour preceding his execution. Humphreys has a wonderful memory which he uses to splendid effect in this very remarkable story which I am going to let him relate *verbatim et literatim*, precisely as John Venters told it.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE STORY OF TALT HALL

“And now he walks the world beyond  
And drifts on hidden seas  
Undesecrated by a chart—  
Blithe derelict at ease.”

“TALT HALL was a ‘rebel,’ you know,” said Venters, as his guests filled their pipes and sat around the log fire in the room that served for kitchen, dining and living room in his big log house. “Like most of us, he fought against the North all through the war, and when he returned home he found that some of his family had been abused by members of the Home Guard: men who had remained home during the war. We figured that the experience of some of his women folks had sort of unbalanced his mind. It was a pretty mean mess and none of us blamed him when he started out to get even. Anyhow, he killed first one of the Home

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Guard and then another. He killed a number of men across the line in the State of Virginia, and on one of his trips over to Wise Court House he was arrested, put in jail, indicted, tried and sentenced to be hanged.

"A short time before hanging day, Hall escaped, left the country and went West. He was not out there very long until he killed his man, and got out of the country. The authorities in the West were not satisfied to let him get away so easy, so they offered a reward and put several detectives on his track. He was finally located, working under an assumed name, in charge of a section gang on a part of the Louisville & Nashville Railroad System—at that time the old Marietta & North Georgia Railroad, running between Marietta and Knoxville, Tennessee. One day, two of these detectives, who had been steered by one of Talt's men who was looking for the reward, walked up to where Talt was talking to some of his gang, drew their guns and told Hall to consider himself under arrest.

"'What for?' Talt asked.

"They replied: 'We arrest you as Talt Hall, and we have a requisition for you.'

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"‘You are mistaken,’ said Talt, ‘my name is not Hall. You don’t need any requisition for me, however; I’ll go along with you. But before I go, just let me go down to the office and give these men their time.’

“Talt had his office in a box car beside the track. As he sat down at his desk and started to make out the men’s time, he noted the eyes of the two detectives roving around the car looking at some small pictures he had nailed up. Turning slightly to the left he opened the top drawer of his desk, like he was going to take out some papers, and quick as a flash he picked up two ‘six-shooters,’ swung back and killed both detectives and broke the arm of the man who had informed on him, and who finally got away.

“First thing I knew,” continued Venters, “Talt was back in Kentucky and came to my place one night to get something to eat. He was in hiding out in the hills, and twice a week I’d carry food out and leave it under a big rock not far from where he was concealed. On one of these trips, Talt told me about having a girl down in Nashville and said he was going down there to see her.

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"‘Now, Talt, don’t do that,’ said I. ‘If you go down there, they will catch you sure.’

“Talt said: ‘No, John, they won’t do it. I could slip in there with a whole regiment sticking around.’

“‘Now, Talt,’ said I, ‘they will get you sure if you go down there,’ and I tried to persuade him not to go. As I left that day, the last word Talt said to me was: ‘John, I’m going.’

“A short time after, when I carried out some more provisions, the food I had left a few days before under the rock was still there. Only a few days later there appeared in the Wise Court House paper an account of the arrest of Talt Hall in Nashville. He had gone there to see his girl, the house had been watched and Talt was arrested. They started to try him down in Nashville for the killing of the two western detectives, but the Governor of Virginia sent a requisition down and brought Talt back to Wise Court House, and the first thing he did was to station a company of soldiers to guard the town, the jail and the roads leading into and out of Wise Court House. The old sentence

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of hanging having expired, it was necessary that he be re-sentenced; and then a fight was started to have his sentence commuted to imprisonment for life. Every possible influence was brought to bear on the Governor, but he was deaf to every plea.

"About five days before the day set for his hanging, he sent for me. I hitched up my team and drove over, some thirty miles, to Wise Court House. It is a long, lonesome ride—one of the longest and lonesomest, and certainly the roughest, that I have ever seen.

"I put my team up and went down to the little hotel for something to eat and then went up to the jail, and after shaking hands with Talt, he said:

"'John, you are not going to let them hang me, are you?'

"'Well, Talt,' I said, 'it looks like it's all up with you.'

"He said to me: 'John Venters, do you mean to tell me that you boys over there in the mountains, hundreds strong, with your Winchesters, are a-going to sleep over there and let them hang me—Talt Hall?'

"My reply was: 'Talt, it's no use. We

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couldn't get in here with a dozen regiments. There are five companies of soldiers in this town to-day and every crossroad is guarded from here to the edge of the Kentucky River. You haven't a chance.'

"After quieting down he said: 'Wait over, John, something will surely happen; I'll get out of this all right. The boys will manage to get in here some way; they won't see Talt Hall strung up.'

"But on the morning of the last day, when the crowd began to assemble for the public hanging, Talt weakened and said to me: 'John, it looks like they were a-going to hang me. If they do, I want you to carry my body back to the Elkhorn, open the coffin, so the boys can look at it, then I want you to dig a little grave up there in the gap between the North Fork of the Kentucky River and the head of the Elkhorn, where for all time the water will flow from the head of my grave down the North Fork of the Kentucky River and from the foot of my grave down the Elkhorn, to the Big Sandy and on to the Ohio, and into the Ocean.'

"At three-thirty, in the presence of a

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tremendous crowd of people, he was hanged, and a short time before dark his body was cut down and placed in a coffin—a plain poplar box—and lifted into my wagon, and I started from the Wise Court House on my trip home, about dusk. It is some thirty miles across the mountains, and the road is a long, rough, and lonesome one. You know, boys, I was a ‘rebel’ soldier. I fought through the whole war, and more than one night I slept on the battlefield with a dead man for a pillow and didn’t think anything about it. But that night, in coming over that mountain road with old Talt’s body in my wagon, more than once I turned my head slightly and looked over my shoulder, half expecting to see old Talt standing up in the wagon!

“I arrived home about daylight, and two of the boys came out and helped me take him out of the wagon. We placed the coffin on two benches that we got at the blacksmith shop, and the body rested there until about half-past eight in the morning, when the men from the hills began to come in to take their last look at old Talt.

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"During the day we dug the grave up in the low gap and just before sunset we took his old rifle and put it in the coffin with him, put in his clothes, closed it up, lifted him into the wagon again and hauled him up to the gap and buried him."

"Now comes a part of the story that neither Talt Hall nor John Venters ever dreamed would come true," said Humpreys as he concluded:

"After the development of that tremendous coal field was brought about by the Consolidated Coal Company, and the Louisville & Nashville Railroad built an extension up the North Fork and through the gap Venters spoke of and on down the Elkhorn, a cut some thirty or forty feet in depth was made through this low gap, and when they dug into Talt's grave all they found was a few boards, a few bones, and his old rifle. These were carried away and buried in one of the nearby country graveyards."

## CHAPTER IX

### THE CALL OF THE WEST

“Who’s worn a bit of purple once  
Can never, never lie  
All smothered in a little box  
When stars are in the sky.”

JUST as if Albert Humphreys who had ridden the trails, searching out the hidden places of the Mesaba Iron Range, built the city of Virginia, prospected for gold and silver in the Canadian Rockies, erected the first concentrating mill in the Kootenay country, founded the town of Trail Creek and saw its railroad started, could remain in the quiet, easy-going South! The opening up of the famous Cabin Creek coal mines and the organization of the Carbon Fuel Company were mere incidents in the life of a man in whom the wanderlust was instinct. The call of the Southland which brought him back to Charleston in 1895 found its full

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fruition in three years. Success? Yes, he had won that many times over if success is to be figured in physical assets. But—"the word came and out he went," following the lure of unforgotten ways. True lover of space and sky line, the whisper was ever in his ear: "Arise, get thee hence, for this is not thy rest," and 1898 found him on his way to Denver, Colorado, wondering what was to be seen over the crest of the Rockies just beyond. No one ever felt the driving impulse of that husky sentiment of Stevenson's: "It is better to travel hopefully than to arrive," with any greater conviction than Humphreys. No one ever looked upon material success in a more impersonal way than he. Money has never meant anything more to him than a means to an end. And when he put his house in order in Charleston and left his coal business in the hands of trusted lieutenants, he was like a boy just out of school and ready for the next adventure, whatever it might be. He had had considerable experience in drilling for oil and gas in his native state, in the old fashioned "wild-cat" method, which, according to the Pennsylvania and West



LOG-DRIVE ON THE POCATALIGO



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Virginia operator, was to assemble a big acreage of land, pick out some place where it was convenient to wood and water, then build a derrick and drill a hole. After having spent a goodly bunch of money, covering an extensive period of time, in this more or less primitive fashion in which, it must be said, he had met with a fair degree of success, he determined to change his methods and make a scientific study of the "oil game," which included the services of a geologist. And the way his old-time disposition to "try anything once" worked out was something to see.

Humphreys located in Denver in order to be near the heart of things. The next sixteen years were spent in the investigation of every likely looking hole in the ground that lay between the Rocky Mountains and the Pacific Ocean on the west and the Gulf of Mexico on the south. Gold and silver, copper and lead, iron, oil, and gas—almost everything, in fact, that could be wrested from the bosom of Mother Earth by the use of drill, dynamite, or pick received his attention during that long period and—

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incidentally, he developed a knowledge of the whys and wherefores of oil producing that stood him in mighty good stead when his real opportunity came.

A persistent fallacy in the public mind is that the Standard Oil Company controls, directly or indirectly, the entire petroleum industry and that the business no longer offers much room for individual effort. As a matter of fact, however, oil production offers no greater obstacles than those which obtain in any general line of commercial activity. Some of the most successful and widely known oil magnates in the country started on "shoe strings." In other words—courage and intelligence will overcome practically all difficulties. Turning to the files of one of the principal periodicals devoted to the oil industry in the United States, I found the following significant editorial comment upon the entrance of Mr. Humphreys into the field in which he was destined to achieve such a spectacular success:

"In March, 1914, there arrived in Oklahoma a gentleman from Denver named

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Albert E. Humphreys, a man of considerable means personally and with plenty of financial allies but absolutely without anything but the most general information as to the Mid-Continent oil fields. Mr. Humphreys owned interests in Colorado gold and silver mines, West Virginia coal mines, and Minnesota iron mines, but his experience in producing petroleum had been confined to a small flyer in West Virginia. After a few weeks' study of the general situation, Mr. Humphreys elected to play the rôle of 'wild-catter,' selected territory within the trend of petroleum possibilities, but in districts generally condemned by the oil fraternity or considered to be too far off. The Denver capitalist was an adherent of the geological theory of oil accumulation and all of his acreage was taken upon well defined geological structures."

In reply to a man who was counseling great caution, I once heard Humphreys say: "I believe in a man's exercising foresight. Too much foresight, however, frequently acts as an hindrance to enterprise. There are certain things which are fundamentally true in the experience of all men—so true, in fact, that they are finally accepted as laws,—but

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these should never stand in the way of a man's taking a reasonable chance. A man is not necessarily a gambler because he backs his own judgment with his own money. Precedent is the refuge of the man who is unable to do his own thinking. Nothing truer was ever said than that 'the man who never makes any mistakes is the man who never gets anywhere.' After all, Experience is the great teacher and that man who can keep his average on the plus side of the ledger instead of the minus side is entitled to the confidence of his friends."

When I heard that Humphreys was going into the Oklahoma oil field in 1914, the preceding remarks came to mind, notwithstanding they had been made many years previous. I knew he would not follow the beaten path, that, on the contrary, he would follow his own judgment. And, here again, we find the pioneer hewing to his own line rather than that of his predecessors. There is no romance in doing certain things a certain way just because they have *always* been done in that way. The trail-blazer looks a little farther ahead than any other kind of a man. He

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really believes that "there is a Divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we may." And—while our conclusions must conform to the sum of human experience, no real discoverer ever followed the line of precedent without a comprehensive admixture of initiative. The proportions of this combination are a matter for individual judgment—and for judgment there is no substitute.

Humphreys' first venture in Oklahoma was in what was known as the "Boynton" oil field, in the southern end of the northwestern part of the State, about twenty miles southwest of the city of Muskogee—a territory which other producers had held in contempt for five years. Here he organized the Merritt Oil and Gas Company, in honor of those royal old trail-blazers, Alfred and Leonidas Merritt, whose fighting qualities and gorgeous backbone had so challenged his admiration in the old Mesaba Iron Range days back in the early Nineties. Before the drills had touched the Boynton oil sands, however, Humphreys, through other subsidiary companies, had begun taking acreage in Kansas and at Blackwell, Oklahoma. Blackwell then was

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in sad disrepute as a result of one spectacular plunging operator winding up his gigantic wild-cat operations at a cost of \$350,000, with only one very doubtful and very deep well to show for his troubles. The first test in the Boynton field was successful. Running true to form, however, and with all the confidence in the world in the results of his geological observations, Humphreys was already looking for other fields. Meanwhile he had organized the Humphreys Petroleum and other companies with headquarters at Tulsa, which successfully developed the "Blackwell" and the "Billings" fields. A test was started upon a great "dome" in New Mexico, others in Kentucky and Kansas and two or three lesser tests in Muskogee and Wagoner Counties, Oklahoma, coincidentally with his leasing up a couple of big domes in Noble County, covering seven thousand acres, and the acquiring of a large acreage in Wyoming, fifty miles from the nearest oil pool.

All of these explorations, it must be remembered, were remote from oil production. All of the operations, however, were carried

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through in precisely the same definite, confident manner by Mr. Humphreys from his temporary headquarters at Muskogee. It must not be imagined for a moment that all of these tests were successful—far from it. That made no difference to Humphreys, however. Never was the capacity of a man to follow through tested any more thoroughly. Courage and intelligence indeed! This was no place for the shoestring operator. Out of the seven different explorations started during the sixteen months he was actively engaged in the Mid-Continent field, three were successful. The Merritt Oil & Gas Company, after developing 1200 barrels daily production at Boynton, was sold to the Carter Oil Company for \$480,000. Altogether more than \$1,250,000 was taken out of the Boynton district—that “contemptible territory,” which the wiseacres had waved aside for over five years. The Duluth-Oklahoma Oil Company, in which Humphreys was interested, with eight thousand acres of oil rights on the Blackwell dome, drilled the two biggest wells in the Blackwell pool, one of which was a gusher and sent a tremor

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through the whole Mid-Continent crude oil market. It started off at the rate of 185 barrels an hour and was making 75 barrels an hour two weeks later. The first well started off at 1600 barrels a day and, after producing 160,000 barrels during a period of six months, was drilled deeper, increasing the production to 60 barrels an hour.

These are interesting figures—not so much from a material standpoint, however, as indicating that godlike quality of the man in staying by. When one figures that the approximate cost of drilling an oil well “in deep territory” is from twenty-five thousand to one hundred thousand dollars, not to mention the cost of accumulating the land—one hardly knows in which category to place the nervy operator who wins three out of seven:—a capitalist or a “wild-catter.” And again—when one considers that all these prospective wells were off the beaten track and located in a sort of technical no-man’s-land—Humphreys’ success brings to mind that scriptural line: “The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner.”

The history of this Oklahoma venture

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would be incomplete without the story of what is known to this day in both the oil and legal annals of the State as the Humphreys' Slater & Steiner deal. Like the poor, the rascals who resort to fake lawsuits with a view to robbing the pioneer of the results of his hard-earned success, are always with us. When Humphreys made his appearance in the Boynton field, there were the usual hang-ers-on who had emigrated from all parts of the country to pick up an honest living(?) in the new oil country. It's hardly necessary to say that "all's grist that comes to the mill" with these gentlemen and that they are no respecters of persons. It must have been Humphreys' frank, open countenance and hearty, cordial manner of dealing with all people that deceived Messrs. Slater & Steiner into thinking that he was an easy mark, and they went after him in the most approved fashion, with the apparent conviction that all there was to do was to start a lawsuit that would make him "ante" in preference to having the sale of his company indefinitely delayed until the case should be decided by the court. They didn't know their man: he

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who regarded that time-honored motto: *Millions for defence but not one dollar for tribute* as the “law and the prophets” for every company he had ever formed. And the thorough thrashing they got in the Oklahoma courts stands to this day as the most interesting record of what this particular strain of operators may expect when they tackle a real fighter.

One of the first acts of the newly organized Merritt Oil & Gas Company was the purchase of an old second-hand derrick from Mr. Slater and a lease on a forty-acre tract of oil land from Mr. Steiner. Stock in the new company was issued to both of these men at the rate of \$50 per share, aggregating \$4,250 in payment for both of the items mentioned, and which constituted mighty good money at that—more, by a large margin, than they would have gladly sold the same for on a cash basis. After the property had reached that point in its development when it was a good “buy” in the open market, the Carter Oil Company offered Humphreys \$480,000 for it and the deal was made accordingly. When Messrs. Slater and Steiner

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heard of it, they commenced suit to enjoin the sale, asked for the appointment of a Receiver, and judgment against the Merritt Oil & Gas Company in the sum of \$150,000 which was supposed to represent an equal division of the value of their stock and the damages (?) sustained. They charged everything on the calendar: fraud, misrepresentation, over-issue of stock, the drilling of other oil wells with the funds of the Merritt Company—in short, everything that an unscrupulous outfit could think of to bolster up their claims. The suit was filed and the papers served and—if precedent meant anything—the plaintiffs felt fairly sure of unearthing sufficient evidence to postpone the sale until they “got theirs.” But, they reckoned without their host. They were counting on Humphreys’ organization of a new oil company being enough like most of those which had gone before to give color to their claims. In other words, while they had no basis for their suspicion, they took for granted that Humphreys, like most of his predecessors, would stand for a “shake-down” rather than face a trial with its pos-

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sible disclosures of questionable management, not to mention the delay in consummating the sale with the chances of its falling through altogether. But—as I have already said: they didn't know their man, and what followed was absolutely characteristic of the man, his methods, his attitude toward his stockholders, and his unfailing fidelity to principle, both in the matter of business and the far more important question of self-respect.

Within three hours after the papers had been served on him, Humphreys was waited upon by one of Slater & Steiner's satellites with a proposition to compromise the suit for fifty thousand dollars. He was promptly thrown out of the office. A prompt trial followed during which it was shown that every share of stock that had been issued had been paid for in cash except those shares which had been issued to the plaintiffs, that the President (Mr. Humphreys), the Secretary and the Treasurer of the company had served without salary, that every dollar expended by the company was represented by proper vouchers and that the company's

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record was absolutely clean and above suspicion. Mr. Humphreys' attorney charged Messrs. Slater & Steiner and their attorneys with being plain blackmailers and asked the Court to refuse the injunction against the sale of the property, also to refuse the Receivership and to issue an order restraining these men or their representatives from interfering with the sale. The presiding Justice, without asking a single question or allowing their attorney to say a word, granted the request immediately. The sale of the Merritt Oil & Gas Company took place at once and not long afterward the Slater & Steiner suit was withdrawn. These estimable gentlemen, already having sold 35 of their original allotment of 85 shares of stock for \$100 per share, in the open market, finally surrendered the remaining fifty shares of stock for a matter of exactly \$2.50 per share, thereby enabling Humphreys to clean their names off the books of the Merritt Oil & Gas Company for the modest sum of \$125: quite a come-down from a suit for \$150,000. But that's Humphreys.

## CHAPTER X

### THE ROMANCE OF BIG MUDDY

“He either fears his fate too much,  
Or his deserts are small,  
Who dares not put it to the touch  
And win—or lose it all.”

THERE is a curious lack of directness in the view which most men take of their own business problems. They find it difficult to assume the attitude of a disinterested observer. Great successes as well as great failures are frequently predicated upon the point of view. The great difficulty with most of us in our various vocations is that we spend entirely too much time on the inside, looking out, instead of maintaining a clear perspective from the outside, looking in. In a previous chapter I have referred to that unusual fairmindedness which enabled Albert Humphreys to step into the shoes of the other

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man, so to speak, and render judgment accordingly. This is not only one of the inherent qualities of the man's moral aspects but of his commercial sagacity as well. Possessing a mentality almost lightning-like in its processes, he has always created the impression upon those less nimble in their thinking, of acting without due deliberation. As a matter of fact, however, I have never known a man possessing a surer or more keenly analytical judgment, either of men or of measures, or one who could more quickly scent the proximity of a mistake or who was quicker to acknowledge one and to shoulder the responsibility accordingly. It is a mere truism to state that men of this stamp are always on the lookout for the viewpoint and the opinions of those with whom they are associated. Humphreys has always been distinguished by his willingness to listen to the other man, no matter how humble his station, believing that every worker in an industry or a profession owes a certain obligation to that industry or profession as a whole. But he never deluded himself with the idea that he had a monopoly of all the

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knowledge and experience bearing thereon. I have turned aside for a moment to paint this little picture of the man in order to cast a sidelight upon the most dramatic and the most sensationaly successful experience of his whole business life. Oh yes—there were those who shrugged their shoulders, commented oracularly on the usual parting of a fool and his money. But—Humphreys had long ago discovered a much greater fool in the man who lacked the courage of his convictions and who never knew the joy of putting his hand to the plow and keeping it there.

During the year 1916 his attention was called to a structure in the State of Wyoming, known as the Big Muddy field, referred to in the preceding chapter as being some fifty miles from the nearest oil pool. Accompanied by his geologist, he made a minute examination of this particular territory and took up a large acreage as a result. Next followed an arrangement with Mr. R. B. Whiteside, a wealthy Duluth lumberman, to drill a well in return for a share in the acreage. Whiteside made three unsuccessful attempts, that is to

## THE ROMANCE OF BIG MUDDY

say he drilled and lost three wells, never getting within 1500 feet of where the pay-sand was to be found. Up to this time, no oil well had been driven below 1800 feet in depth in that structure. In other words, all of the oil experts who had preceded Mr. Humphreys in exploring that territory, considered it sheer foolhardiness and a deliberate waste of money to attempt to drive a well beyond that depth. Humphreys finally made up his mind that he would have to go into the Big Muddy field personally and drill his own well if he ever expected to get back a dollar of his money. Realizing what a husky sum of money it would take to keep on going down until he struck the pay-sand—in the existence of which he was absolutely confident—he made a proposition to the Midwest Refining Company, offering them a lease on six hundred acres if they would drill the well at their own expense. Notwithstanding the fact that their geologists who, with several others, had been over this property a number of times and had condemned it out of hand, the Midwest people took a fortnight to make one last searching investigation, which resulted

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in their turning down Mr. Humphreys' proposition for the following very interesting reason, as they saw it:

An oil "dome" may be resembled to a huge inverted basin in which the oil is held owing to the geological formation of the rock. The Midwest oil experts believed that the northwest end of the dome or structure was open and that, if there had ever been any oil in that dome, it had escaped long ago. Mr. Humphreys' geologist, after a third examination, reached the conclusion that the dome was closed tight at the supposedly open end and that oil would be reached when they drilled into what is commonly known as the Wall Creek Sand, which is found at a depth of about three thousand feet. It was simply a difference of opinion between Mr. Humphreys' geologist and the Midwest geologists, not to mention a goodly aggregation of other geologists, all of whom believed that Humphreys was mistaken and would have his labor for his pains. Humphreys started building his derrick the first week in May, 1916, and, *after six months' unceasing effort*, in the following November, at the astounding

## THE ROMANCE OF BIG MUDDY

depth of 3151 feet, he struck the Wall Creek Sand. Of course, everybody was suitably amazed. Of course, it was a "pure matter of luck," as the rest of the geologists all agreed. And—of course, they all had their own peculiar sensations when the Ohio Oil Company bought a half-interest in the 500 acres immediately surrounding the well for \$500,000 cash. The remaining half, together with the balance of the section and Mr. Humphreys' holdings, was sold to the Midwest Refining Company and a syndicate of New York capitalists for the modest sum of \$1,000,000 cash and a third interest in the stock of the Merritt Oil Corporation, which was formed almost immediately to manage the property—an added tribute to his old friends and trail-blazers, Alfred and Leonidas Merritt of Mesaba fame.

The Merritt Oil Corporation was organized with a capital stock of 600,000 shares at \$10 per share, which were listed on the New York "Curb" late in December, selling at once for \$14, or \$4 above par. The Merritt Oil Corporation to-day has a production of about 5000 barrels per day. It owns be-

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tween 5000 and 6000 acres of the famous Big Muddy dome, and is one of the most prosperous oil companies west of the Mississippi River.

## CHAPTER XI

### HONOR'S DEBT PAID IN FULL

“Leave not, my soul, the unfoughten field—  
Nor leave thy debts dishonored—nor thy place desert  
without due service rendered.  
For thy life, up, spirit, and defend thy fort of clay!”

ALBERT HUMPHREYS was fifty-six years old when he “cashed” on the Big Muddy strike. His first move thereafter was to pay off the remainder of that \$1,200,000 debt of honor which he had been carrying for twenty-three years as a little memento of his experience in the Mesaba Iron Range during the panic of 1893. In the spiritual world as well as the physical, man develops best under responsibility and burden-bearing. He does better work if he has a goal in sight. Paying off the mortgage on a home built for wife and children is one of the greatest incentives to thrift that a young man can have. But—what shall be said of a young man whose

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all-absorbing inspiration at the age of thirty-three is paying for a \$1,200,000 "dead horse?" As a matter of fact—there isn't much to be said that would be at all germane to the experience of the average man; that's just the point—Humphreys isn't an average man:

"The sun set; but set not his hope:  
Stars rose; his faith was earlier up:  
Fixed on the enormous galaxy,  
Deeper and older seemed his eye:  
And matched his sufferance sublime  
The taciturnity of time."

Someone has described a genius as a man who can see just far enough ahead not to get "cold feet." Someone else has characterized a good fellow as one who boasts little, crows gently when in luck, pays up, puts up, shuts up when beaten and comes back for more. Somewhere between these two extremes—and partaking liberally of both—must be placed the unusual personality of this man. Personally, I find it difficult to visualize a young man looking forward with any degree of idealism to the dedication of his life to paying a debt for which no moral responsibility could

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be laid at his door. That Humphreys should have chosen this course demonstrates as nothing else could that the fundamental act of life is not judgment but choice. It is not what people have decided but what people *want* that is of original and divine importance. In a previous chapter—speaking about his experience at the time of the failure of the Humphreys' Lumber Company when he was a youngster of twenty-seven—Humphreys very frankly states that he would just as soon have had the word “Criminal” branded on his back as “Bankrupt.” And—while that does not lessen the tragedy of dedicating half a life time to the payment of a debt of honor, it does, nevertheless, cast a very interesting sidelight upon the character of a young man who, commercially speaking, had not yet found himself.

Life's rewards, materially speaking, frequently appear cheap as we come within sight of them. Fortune loves to give slippers to those who have wooden legs and gloves to those without hands. The inheritance which might have enabled us to live at our ease usually comes to us on the day of our death.

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I was with Albert Humphreys during the early part of January, 1917, when he received two checks aggregating \$1,500,000 for his interests in the Big Muddy structure. And I know whereof I speak when I say that his principal interest in that tidy sum of money centered in the fact that it enabled him to make the final payment on his illustrious "dead horse," the more or less odoriferous memory of which he had been carrying around with him for over twenty years. And he made it with as keen a joy of accomplishment as any young householder ever felt in paying off the mortgage.

During Humphreys' preliminary investigation of the Wyoming oil field, he learned that one V. H. Barnett, in the employ of the United States Geological Survey, had examined the Big Muddy structure in 1914 and went on record with his opinion that it was closed and that oil would be found upon reaching the Wall Creek Sand at an approximate depth of 2500 feet. Just as a matter of sentiment, Humphreys started to look the man up, only to learn that he had been dead some time. He learned,

## HONOR'S DEBT PAID IN FULL

however, that Barnett's widow was still alive and—as luck would have it—employed as a stenographer in a well-known oil firm in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The next time he went to Tulsa he sought out Mrs. Barnett—and—simply as an expression of his own and his associates appreciation of her husband's discoveries in the Big Muddy field—presented to her a check for ten thousand dollars. I could fill the balance of this chapter with records of similar instances of the man's big-heartedness; instead of that, however, I am going to content myself with a quotation from Emerson: "When we see a soul whose acts are all regal, graceful, and pleasant as roses, we must thank God that such things can be and are, and not turn sourly on the angel and say: 'Crump is a better man with his grunting resistance to all his native devils.'"

We are so saturated in what we consider up-to-date methods that we are prone to forget all about elementary morals. We talk glibly about growth and development but most of us really worship at the shrine of the dollar mark. Pin us down, and we know that big men and big business grow naturally

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by virtue of service rendered—and the better the service the more rapid the growth; pygmy-like, however, we act most of the time as if we believed the contrary. Humphreys' dominating characteristic is personal honor. For lack of a better term, I would call him a Master workman. As has been shown all through this biography, he possessed from the very outset of his career a fundamental appreciation of the spirituality of good work and the vital importance to a man's mental and moral development of rendering a full measure of *service* in all his dealings with his brother man. The one thing that stands between most men and a well-rounded-out success is that they are inclined to be business men first and *men* afterward. Whereas, he who hopes to become a worth-while citizen in his community must see to it that he is a man first and devoted to high standards of practice.

If we truly realized the possibilities of growth, nothing would ever take the place of the word *service* in our minds. Because—service is an attribute of character; and—when character is gone, there is nothing left.

## HONOR'S DEBT PAID IN FULL

Humphreys realized very early in life that all men in their respective vocations are salesmen of their own personalities; that the establishment of confidence is the one supreme thing; that no man can hope to successfully conduct any kind of a business or a profession until he has thoroughly "sold" himself and his character to his prospective clients. It was that underlying conviction that made him feel, in his young manhood, that there was little difference between the words "Criminal" and "Bankrupt" when applied by the world at large to the individual. He simply could not tolerate the idea of a tarnished escutcheon. These peculiarly personal and spiritual points were forced upon his mind by reason of his recognition of the fact that no man can live unto himself; that he is a part of all that he has met; that he is "selling" himself all the time, for good or for ill, to every person with whom he comes in contact; and that the operation of this personal salesmanship is complete only when accompanied by the rendering of real *service*.

The man who can see the end of loyal service, heartily rendered, is genius enough to

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see the uttermost end of the universe. He only wins, however, who goes far enough, who recognizes the *divinity* of service, who experiences a real thrill of joy over work well done, who is “on the square” with himself. In a sense, this is religion, because it compels man’s recognition of a Power within himself which makes for righteousness and enables him to deliver that percentage of service which sets him apart from his less spiritually-minded brother. This is the kind of religion that turns ideas into energy. This it was that inspired Humphreys with that determination which, despite the failure of others, kept him on the job unceasingly, night and day, for a period of six months until the Big Muddy well was drilled into the Wall Creek Sand and thus made possible the fulfilment of his hopes. Not until duty looms larger in a man’s mind than his rights does he begin to see clearly—and, when that time arrives, the Humphreys type of man sees duty as a privilege and not as compulsion. There never entered into Humphreys’ mind the slightest question of his ultimate success; he never learned how to “strike sail to a

## HONOR'S DEBT PAID IN FULL

fear." He was his own severest critic. He knew the driving power behind the word *must*, and instead of evading it he welcomed it with open arms. And yet—there were those around the Big Muddy field who dubbed that 3151 foot well "Humphreys' Folly" long before it attained that depth. Truly, generalities are the refuge of feeble minds; but, then—it takes an oyster knife to open some men's eyes.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE OLD BROWN SUIT

“Let those the gods have blinded  
Hold their long feud with Fate—  
And clutch at toys that never yet  
Could make one mean man great.  
Let those that Earth has bastarded  
Fret and contrive and plan—  
But I will enter like an heir  
The old estate of man!”

UPSTAIRS in a closet in the Humphreys' home in Denver, there hangs an old brown suit of clothes, bespattered with oil, for which Albert Humphreys entertains a high regard not to be commercially measured. He wore it on the day that his first well came through in the Boynton district down Oklahoma way. When an oil well is “shot”—that's no place for purple and fine linen. When the Boynton well struck there was quite a shower of the precious liquid which sprinkled everybody and everything within

## THE OLD BROWN SUIT

a radius of several hundred yards and which also gave great promise of Humphreys' subsequent sale of that particular property for the tidy sum of \$480,000. Humphreys wore that old suit through all his activities in the petroleum field. The only time he was ever seen without it, during his various trips to Tulsa, was coming and going to the railway station. In fact—he became a sort of public character and it was a very common thing to hear the remark as he passed by, either out in the oil fields or on the streets of Tulsa: "There goes Humphreys in his old brown suit." And—almost as frequently something would be said in the same relation about "the domes that begin with B," referring to the "Boynton," "Blackwell" and "Billings" fields where Humphreys distinguished himself as a more or less scientific "wild-catter." When he went up into the Wyoming fields, the old brown suit went along and another dome that began with B was added to the list in the "Big Muddy" structure.

It is strange what deep impressions are made by little things. With all his men-

## THE PIONEER

tality, his wealth of experience, love of the soil, and knowledge of the secrets which old Mother Earth hides so closely in her bosom, Humphreys' regard for that old brown suit almost attained to a superstition. He wouldn't any more go out into an oil field otherwise clothed than he would have thought of going without any clothing at all. One would naturally say: "Of course not—why would he take the chances of ruining a perfectly good suit of clothes while he had an old suit that was scarcely fit for any other use?" But—every one of us into whose life the romance of business has entered will appreciate the attitude of the man. The old brown suit cut no figure as a sentimental reminder of his success. Rather was it a suggestive memento of the transposition of certain figures from the debit to the credit side of the ledger. Yea, verily—the man must be true to his dream though God Himself should die! And to-day, I question whether there is enough money lying around in the State of Colorado to purchase that old brown suit, notwithstanding the fact that one of these days when he has "gone the long

## THE OLD BROWN SUIT

trail" it will probably find its way into the hands of the ragman.

In all we notice in the eyes of man, in the way of desire, expression or reminiscence, in all we read of his writings, and whatever we hear in his outpourings of speech—there is nothing to match his hunger for home. While—"strong lust of gear shall drive him forth," a man must come back weary with labor if he is really to taste home—that is, the *real* home; the place inside the mind. It was to be expected, therefore, when Humphreys left his West Virginia coal interests in the hands of trusted lieutenants and turned his face from Charleston toward the West, that he would keep in touch with the old town and its associations. From "a prophet without honor," he has grown to be a "favorite son"—if ever such a thing was known outside of political terminology. And—it may be said of Humphreys in Charleston, as expressed in the epitaph of Sir Christopher Wren, the famous architect of the Seventeenth Century, who lies in the ancient churchyard of St. Paul's, London: "Wouldst thou see his monument—look around."

## THE PIONEER

In Charleston there is a beautiful building known as the Union Mission, containing a chapel which seats six hundred people, a Sunday school roster of three hundred children, which requires the services of eighteen persons, involving a payroll approximating thirty thousand dollars per year. This Mission houses seventy-five homeless children and a large number of men and women who gravitate toward it from all parts of the South and who are taken in hand by a corps of consecrated, non-sectarian Christian workers who regard it as their greatest privilege to put unfortunate members of society upon their feet and give them a fresh start in life. As one walks through this splendid institution, it is difficult to imagine that it had its beginning about ten years ago in an old storeroom, furnished with a few rough benches, and a drygoods box for an altar, where the derelicts of the night were welcomed to sleeping room on the floor, minus blankets. To-day its ramifications extend, not only throughout the State of West Virginia but into adjoining States as well. It has been the starting point of similar institutions

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which have been established in the cities of Evansville, Indiana; Akron and Canton, Ohio; Petersburg, Va.; Parkersburg and Wheeling, West Virginia. It is a place where the latch string is always out and where a welcome hand is extended to every unfortunate who enters its doors, and no questions asked except those which are designed to be personally helpful. In the near future, a building will be erected upon the Mission property which will be devoted to a free clinic and a women's and children's hospital.

Nearby may be found the Salvation Army Citadel and the Humphreys and the Boyd Memorial churches—the latter being in memory of both Mr. and Mrs. Humphreys' parents. Except the memorial churches, which were built exclusively by Albert E. Humphreys and his cousin, Albert J. Humphreys, the other institutions mentioned are the outcome of the public-spiritedness of some of West Virginia's best citizens who were drawn together in a good cause as a result of Albert Humphreys' leadership, and who saw—first of all through his eyes—the necessity for the helping hand from the out-

## THE PIONEER

side in order to raise the standard of manhood and womanhood in that city. It would be of comparatively little interest to chronicle the details of just how these splendid institutions were started and it would not fit in with Humphreys' ideas to do more than merely mention that he had a part in a work of which the whole city of Charleston is proud.

Out in Sissonville on the crest of a hill locally known as "Mount Zion," is a little wooden church, the cornerstone of which was laid in 1870. In a small tin box deposited in the center of that stone there is a ten-cent piece, representing the first money ever earned by the subject of my sketch, at the age of ten years. This modest little edifice, which took the place fifty years ago of a log school house in which divine service was held on Sundays, has never been closed during all the years that have flown. And—sometime in the near future, Humphreys is going back there to the scenes of his boyhood to build them a new church of brick and stone instead of rough lumber. And—knowing my friend as I do—I venture the statement that he will get as much pleasure out of a glance at the

MOUNT ZION CHURCH AND THE HUMPHREYS BURIAL PLOT





## THE OLD BROWN SUIT

little silver piece in the tin box as he will from ministering to the comfort of those who have grown up around that old house of prayer since his departure many years ago.

At the outset of this life story of my friend I referred to him as a lover of liberty and his fellow man, who has kept his faith without a stain amid a sordid world. A man's self-sufficiency will carry him only so far; in the presence of his moral responsibility to his Maker and in his secret knowledge of the merits or demerits of his own stewardship, it drops from him like a discarded garment. No one realizes more keenly than this same Humphreys that the biggest fool of all is the man who fools himself. Humphreys has always lived close to old Mother Nature and, as Emerson most eloquently expresses it: "Nature, as we know her, is no saint. The lights of the church, the ascetics, Gentoos and corn-eaters, she does not distinguish by any favor. She comes eating and drinking and sinning. Her darlings, the great, the strong, the beautiful, are not children of our law, do not come out of the Sunday School, nor weigh their food, nor

## THE PIONEER

punctually keep the Commandments.” One would not do well to smite Humphreys on one cheek with the expectation that he would turn the other for a similar assault. But—no appeal to his sense of fairness was ever made in vain. With him public-spiritedness is a form of religion—which is one way of saying that, while he was systematically setting aside, for a period of twenty years and over, sufficient funds to cover the final interment of his \$1,200,000 “dead horse,” he didn’t overlook his self-imposed duties as a citizen of his old home town, notwithstanding the fact he had transferred the far greater part of his commercial activities to the West.

If there be any philosophy of History its final word is Redemption. Constructive helpfulness and not maudlin sympathy is Humphreys’ *motif*. He has no inclination to lay down any rules of life for the other man to follow. He realizes, however, that a churchless country would mean a godless country and he has no use for the slacker in either the spiritual or material walks of life. I have heard him say that “unmindfulness of God, who has always been so mindful of us, is

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mean.” And—while his anger burns like a white-hot fire against the human parasite wherever found—his thought is always for the poor and the afflicted and his hand is ever in his pocket. He plays a big game in a big way and he gets a tremendous amount of pleasure out of life. I think he would rather go fishing than go to church. On the other hand, I have known him, busy man that he is, to travel a thousand miles to establish a non-sectarian mission where local effort had failed, and it’s only fair to say that his money always follows his arguments. A bit of a Nature-worshiper he. I have seen his hat come off in the presence of a glorious sunset with much the same spirit of adoration that he would bare his head before the American flag. And—while he may never have read the following lines by Neidhardt—I’ll take a chance on his standing for them:

“What! House me my God?  
Take me in where no blossoms are blowing!  
No riot of green and no sky,  
And no bird song—no growing?  
Parcel out what already is mine, like a vendor of staples?  
See! Yonder my God burns revealed in the sap-drunken  
maples.”

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A little romance in the heart, a little horse sense in the head, a little iron in the purpose —these three things will keep a man going in the world as long as it's decent for him to stay. If—"he has achieved success who has lived well, laughed often, and loved much, who has gained the respect of intelligent men and the love of little children, who has filled his niche and accomplished his task, who has always looked for the best in others and given the best he had,"— then Humphreys has been a very successful man and will leave the world better than he found it. If there be one text over and above another by which Humphreys has ordered his daily life, it might be expressed as follows: "Help your neighbor but keep your nose out of his affairs." If—as a result of having observed his mental processes and his aggressive methods over a term of years—I were asked to formulate his creed, I should express it somewhat as follows:

"Do what thy manhood bids thee do,  
From none but self expect applause;  
He noblest lives and noblest dies  
Who makes and keeps his self-made laws."

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE AWAKENING

"For God speaketh once,  
Yea, twice, though man regardeth it not.  
In a dream, in a vision of the night,  
When deep sleep falleth upon men,  
In slumberings upon the bed;  
Then he openeth the ears of men  
And sealeth their instruction.

"I had heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear;  
But now mine eye seeth Thee:  
Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent  
In dust and ashes."

THE BOOK OF JOB.

THERE was an interval of several weeks between the writing of this chapter and those which precede it, which allowed for the trip to Charleston referred to herein, but for which this chapter never would have been written. No one appreciates more than I that a biography from which the weaknesses and the failings of the subject are excluded

## THE PIONEER

cannot be fully representative. As a matter of fact my friend Humphreys has so few faults and they are, relatively, so unimportant beside the big, salient points of his character as to be unworthy of record; they simply would have to be dragged in bodily, so to speak, because they constitute no bearing whatsoever on the man's make-up. The way in which the writing of this last chapter was brought about, however, illustrates a definite phase of the man's latter-day development which was not fully apparent before we went to Charleston together and which clearly indicates that spiritual growth is not necessarily a matter of years. The Humphreys with whom I spent a fortnight in Charleston was a different man from the one I had always known and the change was all the more remarkable by reason of that unbending pride which had dominated his life for many years having been withdrawn from the forefront and given its proper place in the background of that intensely active mind. It is quite fitting, therefore, that this chapter should stand by itself as an afterthought or—I might say—an afterglow of a remarka-

UNION MISSION CAMP IN THE HILLS





## THE AWAKENING

ble experience. Shortly after bringing in the "Big Muddy" well, Humphreys was stricken by a serious illness, under the shadow of which he lay for two years; it was a general breakdown resulting from the unremitting strain of nearly thirty years' work at a tension to which no man should ever subject himself if he has any idea of completing his allotted span. There is no need to dwell upon the agony of spirit of this man of power, shorn of his wondrous dynamic energy, thrown to one side like so much flotsam washed up on the sea beach: a splendid creation, a marvelous mechanism "scrapped." They were two long, dark years during which but few letters passed between us—indeed, there was nothing to say and little to think of but that terrific text: "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" My readers can imagine my feelings when one bleak day in February, 1920, my telephone rang and I heard the familiar voice, with its beloved intonations, clear, strong, and vibrant with all its old-time energy, calling my name from—it seemed to me—

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across the void of years. Yes, he was here in New York, he had come across the continent without saying a word to me and sprung his little surprise upon one whose prayers had been uttered more than once on his behalf. And as he told me the story—how

“God moves in a mysterious way  
His wonders to perform”—

his face shone with “the light that never was, on sea or land”—and I saw it all and marveled.

As he put it, rather laconically, at the end of one of the most tremendously interesting stories I ever listened to in my life: “A man who is shunted to one side for two years has a lot of time to think—and I thought.” The net result of his thinking was as it always is with men of his type: an immediate differentiation of the shadow and the substance. He saw that practically everything he had done during those three busy decades had been accomplished in the spirit of personal pride; that his uprightness of life, his scrupulous regard for his word of honor, his charities, etc., had all been more or less empty

## THE AWAKENING

because of their selfish objectivity. He had been successful—yes; he had been glad to share a part of his success with others as a matter of general decency, simply because he was naturally keen to see others get a chance for “theirs.” He had whipped some of his bitterest opponents thoroughly and proceeded to forget them because he wasn’t the kind of a man to carry a grudge and—besides, he didn’t believe in any man playing a cheap game, and he was too busy to spend any time thinking about the men who tried to block his projects, all of which were admittedly big, broad, and constructively helpful as this record shows. He had been self-sufficient, yes—but not to an offensive extent. He had been a fine citizen, a splendid husband and father, a gorgeous friend and a generous enemy and he loved his fellow man, or at least he believed he did. What was it that was lacking? He found what it was! He had been working for himself and not for the Divine Master. He saw it all; he got the slant that every thinking man gets sooner or later, especially if he be beaten to his knees—that the basis of his whole scheme was a

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species of selfishness, born out of a supreme confidence in his own strength, and that readjustment was inevitable if he were going to live up to his light. And right there and then he turned himself toward his Maker in a humility of spirit that he had never felt before and vowed that if he should recover his health and strength he would devote his life to His service. In his belief, his return to health dates almost from that very hour, and the good Lord knows I have no reason to doubt it—and if I had, I'd try to believe it for the sake of my own benighted spirit; because Humphreys' spiritual rebirth is just as real as his recovered sight was to blind Bartimeus of Holy Writ.

In the following May he returned again to New York and I accompanied him to Charleston whither he journeyed for the purpose of fulfilling two especial desires which had occupied his mind for a long time: to take part in the dedication ceremonies of the Union Mission which had been indefinitely postponed for nearly two years because of his illness, and also to complete the arrangements for another public benefaction—the

## THE AWAKENING

construction of a summer camp up in the hills not far from the city, to be conducted in conjunction with the work of the Mission. This camp was organized for the especial benefit of Charleston's children of the poor—little folk of both sexes who are strangers to babbling brooks, beautiful meadows, fields of flowers, mountain air, and singing birds. It includes a number of buildings and a spacious assembly pavilion, not to mention a wonderful swimming pool and a never failing spring—all ensconced in an exquisite valley far above the level of the city. It has already become a veritable god-send to the poor kiddies of the city, all of whom will have a chance, every summer, for many years to come, for a complete change of environment.

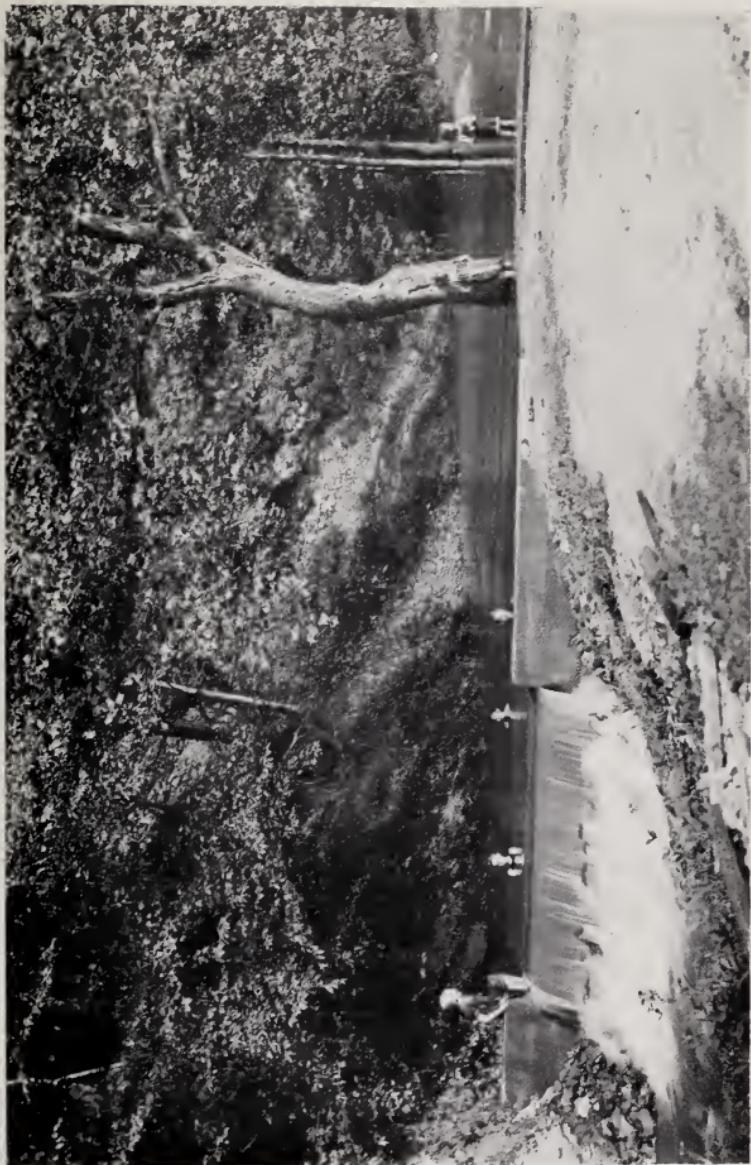
It was a week of rejoicing for those who knew what the past two years had meant to their dear friend whom they had despaired ever seeing again. Part of the dedication program was devoted to the unveiling of a bronze tablet commemorating the services of the Mission's distinguished patron. And it was no little source of happiness to Hum-

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phreys to have Rev. Francis Napoleon Lynch, Pastor of the Marietta, Ohio, Methodist Church, who was his boyhood friend and had been converted in the old church on "Mount Zion" at Sissonville, come to Charleston to preach the dedicatory sermon. Verily, it was a feast of good things, accompanied by a spiritual uplifting which was felt throughout the city.

During the week, Humphreys, accompanied by his dear old friend Col. "Bob" Carr, known throughout the length and breadth of West Virginia, and who was with him when the site of the city of Virginia, Minnesota, was selected, back in the old Mesaba days; Frank Cox, who has been Humphreys' partner for over thirty years and in charge of all his West Virginia interests; Rev. Lynch and some intimate friends identified with the Mission work, all—drove out to Sissonville where he had not visited for years, and spent the day walking through the scenes of his childhood, not forgetting the old mill which his father had built and operated for so many years, now being carried on by Humphreys' eldest brother, Adam C.,

UNION MISSION CAMP SWIMMING HOLE





## THE AWAKENING

known to the whole countryside as "Doc Humphreys, the Honest Miller," by whom and his good wife the party was entertained at an old-fashioned country dinner, the memory of which will be a sweet savour to the writer of this biography for a long time to come. "Doc" has never cared to stray from the old hearthstone and would rather be known as Sissonville's "Honest Miller" than to have been the discoverer of the Mesaba. In the afternoon, the whole party repaired to the old church on "Mount Zion" and Pastor Lynch preached a sermon that brought those who were left of his boyhood days "upstanding," and at which time Humphreys promised to build them a new church edifice of brick and stone—one that would last as long as any of the present village-folk of Sissonville would be apt to worship there, and then some. And when I saw my old friend standing in the pulpit of that primitive house of worship and heard him tell how different the world looked to him since he had been rescued from both physical and spiritual sickness, it made me happier than these cold sentences can ever

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indicate. His words will remain with me for many a year to come: "When I get up in the morning and look out on the world," said he, "I feel as if I mounted to the seat of an immense reaper and, taking the invisible reins in my hands, guided the horses down through vast fields of golden grain, returning at night with a rich harvest for my Heavenly Master. The sun, sky, streams, and trees, yes—the whole world appears more wonderful to my newly-opened eyes than I ever dreamed was possible. And it's all because, to-day—no matter what I do—I'm working for Him." It was this experience that determined me to add this final chapter, without altering in any way those that have preceded it.

Ah! No one realizes more than this dear friend of mine just what a man's reactions are when he feels that he has been snatched from the edge of the precipice by unseen hands at the very moment he was slipping over. How our eyes turn to the future in such an hour! Just give us one more chance and see what wonderful use we will make of our time! Human life faces only one way.

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For all the past toward which we yearn or for which we may feel sorry; for all the love which has lighted up the days behind us or the tragic mistakes which have darkened them—there can be no stay of foot, and looking backward can not change the front of our forward march once we get into our stride. Yes, indeed—to the very limit of life's onward journey, to-morrow is more than yesterday. We would rather lift the veil of any day to come than to look upon the face of any day that is gone or all the days that we remember. Truly, when God lays His hand upon a man for the purpose of turning him to Himself and to His work, that, indeed, is one of the tides in the affairs of men which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune—such fortune as the purely material man can have no conception of. If a man can only be turned! or, I might say: if he is *worth turning*. Albert Humphreys had to be brought to death's door in order that he might "find himself." He is not the type of man who could ever remain content in the shallows. Those splendid faculties which have been so successfully devoted to material things for so many years

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will find their spiritual fruition as well. Sustained by the knowledge that he is doing his Master's will, together with certain natural tendencies which will assume their proper position in the vision which guides his feet to-day, his future life is bound to be a series of rich experiences in good works. "So mote it be!"

### KING ALI'S QUEST

"There came a priest into the court one day,  
And, standing by the throne with unbent knee,  
He cried: 'Great Allah bade me come and say,  
O King, thy brother hath sore need of thee.'

"Our brother?" quoth the Monarch, wondering.  
'Know we are Ali, last of all our race.'  
'Thy brother hath sore need of thee, O King,'  
The priest replied, and vanished from the place.

"At night the great town slept beside the sea,  
But on his pallet restless tossed the King,  
And heard: 'Thy brother hath sore need of thee'  
Through all the palace chambers echoing;

"Till, when gray morning through the window crept,  
Forced by the summons pleading at his door,  
Ali went forth while all the sentries slept,  
And took a way no king had gone before.

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"He went through fetid lane and alley dim,  
He saw in prison foul the young child lie,  
He heard by stake and cross the martyr's hymn,  
He saw in lazar-hut the friendless die.

"In vain they called him to his crown and throne,  
He laughed that such poor playthings yet should be,  
And answered all: 'I find at last my own,  
I know the brother that hath need of me.'

"If tomb King Ali had, it is unknown,  
His palace columns razed by Time's rude hands,  
For ages lost his scepter, and his throne,  
His ashes mingled with the desert's sands—

'Yet down the chill wind of the Past is blown  
Like breath of roses o'er a wintry sea,  
These words of love: 'I find at last my own,  
I know my brother that hath need of me.'"

**FINIS**







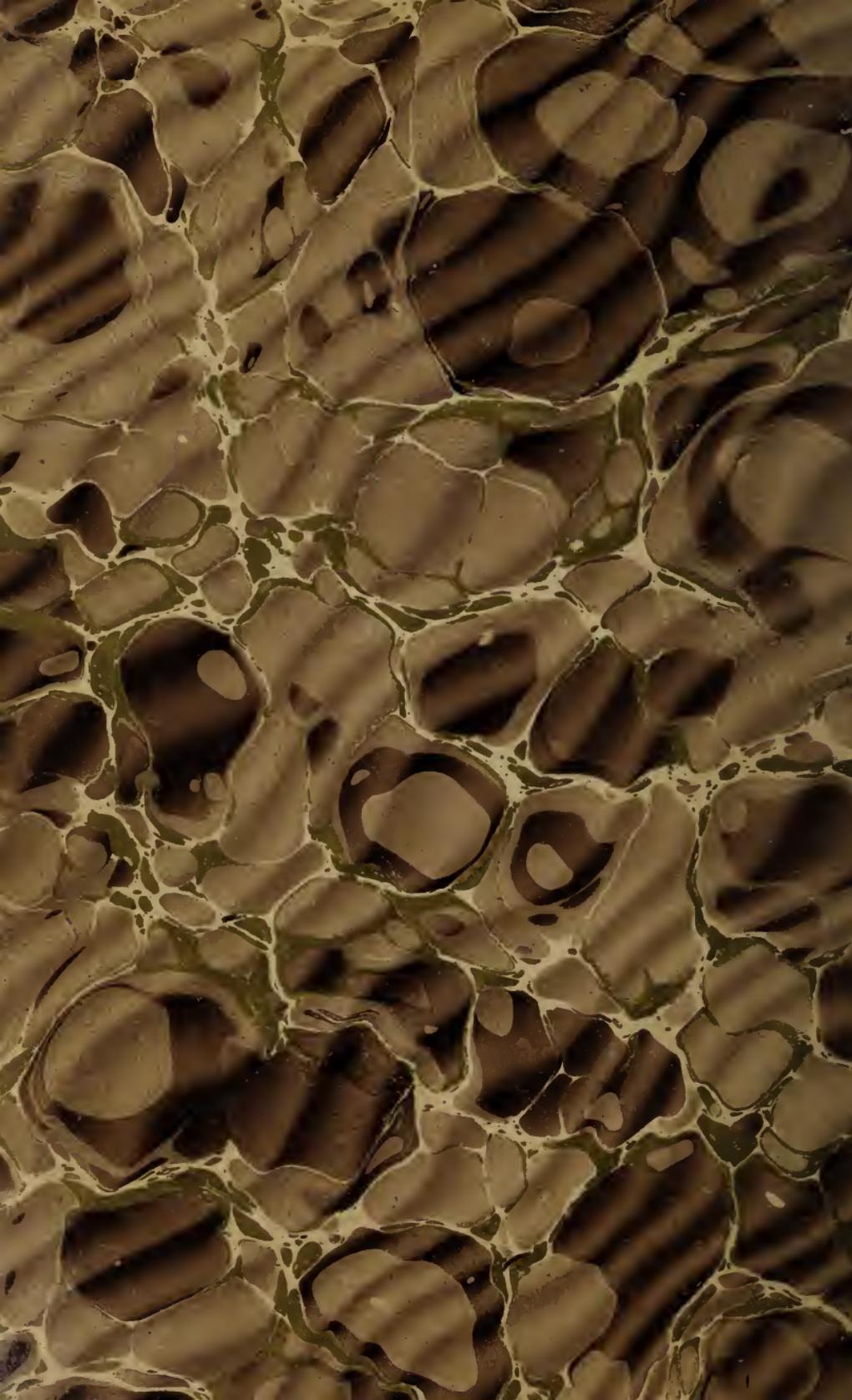












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